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Vol. L.

Delaware Dick, THE YOUNG RANGER SPY; OR, Brother Against Brother.

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AUTHOR OF "VAGABOND JOE," "THE DUMB SPY," "KEEN
KNIFE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. WING-OF-THE-WIND.

A SUBDUED light shone from the windows of the old stone church of Woodvale, that stood on the road to Princeton.

It was nothing uncommon to see a light there on Sunday nights; and to hear the voices of men and women ascending in prayer and song to Heaven; but this was on Friday night, and at the hour of twelve. The sound of voices was within; but they were not engaged in prayer and song, but in secret conference. They were pitched in low, yet excited tones.

A score of men stood around the altar, discussing the progress of the Revolution, and rejoicing over the defeat of the American arms. They were Tories of the deepest dye; and had met in the old church to hold secret council—sacriligious conference in the sanctuary of God, that no one would mistrust their designs of evil.

Outside, along the road, in and out of the moonshine and shadows paced a sentinel with a musket on his shoulder and a pistol in his belt. He moved as softly as a panther, with both eye and ear on the alert, for those were dangerous times.

The church stood on the margin of a little clearing. Across the road opposite was a deep, dense woods, through which the Stony river crept noiselessly as a serpent. Half a mile back from the church began the surrounding settlements, that numbered many homes and hundreds of people. These people were representatives of different nationalities, but all were striving in common to build up homes in the New World—all worshipping together at the Woodvale church. There were no disputes, no differences between them, until the Colonies revolted against the oppression of the mother country; then they became divided. It was Rebel and Tory, Patriot and Royalist.

Some tried to maintain a strict neutrality, but these always bore watching, for they were invariably found to be in sympathy with the crown. The meeting in Woodvale church was composed of this class.

The sentinel pacing to and fro before the church stopped ever and anon to listen. The air was clear and bracing, for it was a December night. The stillness was profound. The moon was in the zenith.

Suddenly the Tory guard saw

something coming down the road from the east. At least he thought he saw something—he thought it was a horseman. But he bent his head and listened and heard nothing. He made an ear-trumpet of his hand, and listened with the same result. He stood his musket on the ground and pressed his ear upon the muzzle with no better success. He again glanced up the road, satisfied now that he had been laboring under an optical delusion. But as sure as his name was Jeduthan Wool, there was a horseman, or something that closely resembled one, approaching along the road. To be more certain, however, that the misty moonlight was playing no freak with his eyes, he rubbed them with his knuckles, then took another look. And, good heavens! it was no delusion! There came a horseman without a doubt; but not a sound did the animal's hoofs make upon the hard, frozen earth.

Jeduthan Wool was superstitious as a witch, and the absence of the sound of hoof-strokes, and the phantom-like appearance thrown around the figure by the spectral white moonbeams, filled him with a vague terror.

"It must be the ghost of some dead Patriot coming to haunt us," the Tory thought, trembling with silent fear.

The silent horseman approached with great rapidity. Jeduthan Wool became fascinated with terror. He crouched in the shadows of the fence, and with dilated eyes and chattering teeth, watched the object of his fear float past him and turn in toward the church. But he did not see that the horse's feet were muffled in great padded shoes of woolen material, that inclosed the entire hoof, confined at the hock-joint.

The men in the church intrusted their safety to their friend Wool; and to prevent any one looking in they had hung curtains over the lower half of the windows. But the horseman, who must have anticipated this blinding of the windows, was prepared for them, and riding up to one of them, he stopped his horse, then rising to his feet stood up in the saddle and gazed over the curtain into the building.

Closely he scanned each face assembled around the altar. A glance at each one would have satisfied him, but he heard a man speaking in an excited tone, and he could not resist the temptation to listen.

"Men, our cause is just," he heard him say; "but whether it is or not, we must fight for our king; burn for our king; kill for our king; and, while it is not known that we are royalists, we can easily sound the sympathies of our neighbors, and when we find that they are rebels, let their homes, their property and their lives, if need be, pay the penalty. And"—here his voice fell till it was inaudible to the listener, but in an excited whisper continued: "boys, true as there is a God, there's a face at the window!"

The next moment the pane of glass, against which the silent horseman's face had been pressed, was the converging point of a score of bullets. It was shattered to atoms; while the deep, murderous roar of the muskets rolled from altar to entrance, floor to belfry, as if in search of an outlet to the open air.

The bullets passed out at the window over the head of the horseman as he dropped astride of his horse and galloped away, silent as a shadow, swift as a deer.

Jeduthan Wool rallied from his stupor when he heard the boom of his friends' guns, and sent a shot after the silent rider.

The men came storming from the church, calling aloud on Jeduthan. He answered them from down the road, whither he had gone in pursuit of the mysterious Tam O'Shanter.

The men mounted their horses and thundered away after him. Down the road they tore like madmen.

"Ride, men!" shouted one who seemed to be the leader, "for should it become known that we are royalists, the devil will be to pay. That infernal Delaware Dick will give us no rest. Ride up, men; ride up."

A mile from the church they passed a house whose inmates were wild with excitement. A negro met them at the gate.



"WAKE UP, MY LORD, YOU ARE MY PRISONER."

"Fore the Lord, who is you?" he asked, with chattering teeth.

"Friends, in pursuit of a horseman—see one go down the road just now?" demanded the Tory leader.

"Yes, massa," replied the trembling darkey; "but he wa'n't in the flesh—he war a spirit! He jist flipped by like nothin'. Massa Bodson, he's gone over to tell de Simpkinses, and de whole family's on dar heads wid fear. Lor'! Lor'! but—"

The Tories heard no more, but galloped on. Suddenly a light before them lit up the sky. It was in the vicinity of Rugby's house—he who was speaking when the unknown looked in at the church window.

As they approached the light, Rugby saw that his barn was in flames.

"Forward, men!" he shouted. "The fire-fiends are abroad—my barn is wrapt in flames—my home will follow," and as if upbraided by a guilty conscience, his mind went back to the speech he was making in the church when he saw the face at the window.

Ten minutes' ride brought them to Rugby's premises. Rugby drew rein in the light of his burning barn, dismounted and ran to the house where all was terror. As he approached the door a horseman floated alongside of him from the adjacent shadows, and drawing rein, thrust a paper into Rugby's hand.

Rugby drew his heavy pistol, but before he could use it, the silent horseman, whose face was the same seen at the church window, dashed away, leaving his horse over the low picket fence in front of the house and disappearing down the road.

Rugby stood like a stone statue, and watched the silent and mysterious horseman disappear from view. Not a word had escaped his lips, not a sound had his horse's hoofs produced.

He opened the paper, and in the red glare of his burning barn he read:

"I heard your speech in the Woodvale church, and I recognized every face there. Remember that eye for eye, and tooth for tooth shall be the motto of

"WING-OF-THE-WIND."

An exclamation burst from Rugby's lips, and his face grew pale.

"Boys," he said to his companions, who, at this juncture, came up, "it will be war to the knife between rebels and royalists now, in the Stony river valley. That horseman was that terrible young rebel scourge, Delaware Dick, the Spy, and Wing-of-the-Wind, the Ranger, as he is called. Men, mount your horses and ride him down!"

The Tories once more took to the saddle and dashed away in pursuit of the young patriot.

On down the road toward Trenton sped the Wing-of-the-Wind.

After mile after mile was traversed under the crisp November night.

In and out of the moonlight and darkness flitted and flashed the young patriot, then his Tory pursuers.

The road was in good condition, and Delaware Dick being familiar with every crook and turn, amused himself by slackening the speed of his horse until the Tories were nearly in reach, then darting away and appearing, first in their rear, then in front, to the confusion and rage of the party.

At length the broad expanse of the Delaware river burst from the woods before him. Ice had formed in a thin border along the shores, and the middle current ran swift and cold. But, without a moment's hesitation, the fearless young Whig rode into the river and swam his horse over to the Pennsylvania shore, where the Tories dare not follow.

In his wet clothes the hardy youth galloped on through the chilly night. He had gone about five miles when the twinkling of a hundred camp-fires burst upon his view. A smile of joy lit up his countenance, and he moved on until suddenly halted by a sentinel—one of the pickets of the American army.

"Who comes there?" was demanded.

"Delaware Dick," answered the young patriot.

The ranger was known to nearly every man in the American army, and without further words the sentinel allowed him to advance.

Entering the picket lines, he moved slowly on through the encampment, and in a few minutes he stood, with hat in hand, in the presence of the commander-in-chief of the American army, General George Washington.

CHAPTER II.

DELAWARE DICK'S INTERVIEW WITH WASHINGTON.

DELAWARE DICK was well known to Washington, having previously rendered him some service as a spy; and at sight of him the general uttered an exclamation of delight.

The cabin in which the general had established his quarters for the night, was lit up by the ruddy glow of a fire that burned in a yawning fire-place. In this light the face and form of our hero was plainly revealed.

He could not have been over twenty years of age; and yet his face bore the intelligence and strength of a more mature manhood. Indomitable courage, reckless daring and resolute energies were predominant upon every feature—in the steel-gray eyes, the rather prominent nose and the large, expressive mouth. In form he was rather below the medium size, yet nature had bestowed upon his lithe figure all the physical developments of a perfect man.

He was dressed and equipped in a manner becoming his position, and which gave additional strength to his fine martial bearing, and lent an air of dashing gallantry to his movements.

Taking a seat near the fire where he could dry his wet clothing, Delaware Dick entered into conversation with the general and his men. He narrated his adventure on the Jersey side, particularly that at

the Woodvale church, and his flight and escape across the Delaware river.

Dick noticed that a heavy cloud rested upon the brow of Washington and his generals. He saw that the commander was troubled; his very tone indicated a despondent and gloomy spirit. His features were almost severe in their expression of agitation.

"Dick, my boy," the general said after listening to our hero's story, "the Tories will now grow bolder. They will no longer hesitate to speak their sentiments, and encourage the British army by all assistance possible. The Jerseys are completely within the enemy's control, and he only awaits the freezing over of the river to follow us into Pennsylvania. Total defeat seems inevitable, unless we can make a sudden movement and retrieve some of our lost ground and revive the spirit of the army and the country. Despondency and gloom has seized the public mind, and nothing but some brilliant feat can ever restore it to its wonted degree of strength and hope."

"I admit, general," said Delaware Dick, "that our prospect of success is not flattering; but what mercy would we receive should we give up?"

"We must not give up, Dick," answered the general, resolutely; "we must not think about giving up, for our cause being just, God will help us in the end. The fear of a severe winter troubles me now, for our soldiers are almost naked. The want of the necessaries and comforts of life may prove the most destructive enemy to my army. So, something must be done. I believe you are well acquainted with the Delaware valley; are you not, Dick?"

"I've been raised along the Delaware, general, and know every crook and turn for fifty miles above and below."

The general's face brightened.

"I was just thinking since you entered, that if I were in possession of Lord Cornwallis's plans of the winter's campaign, as well as the number and disposition of his army, it would be of inestimable value to me; but none but a daring spy could obtain this information."

"Did my coming suggest this to you, general?" asked Delaware Dick.

"It did," answered the general, a faint smile playing about his lips.

"General, I am at your service," declared the young ranger. "If you request it of me, I will sacrifice my all to obtain this information for you."

"You know your ability and resources, Dick, and the dangers that would attend the adventures of a patriot spy in the British camp; but for this information, I, as well as our country, would be grateful. Cornwallis is some thirty miles up the river on the Jersey side, and since he has sent but a detachment of his army to Trenton, I am inclined to think that he is arranging a trap for me."

"General, I will start this night for Cornwallis's head-quarters," said our hero. "I left my band of rangers some ten miles up the river, and I will join them, and approach the enemy close as possible; then disguise myself, and enter the British lines."

With the blessings of Washington and his generals, Delaware Dick soon took his departure upon the dangerous mission of a spy; and in less than an hour, he was on the Jersey side of the Delaware, moving up the river.

Just as it was growing day, he came upon the bivouac of a score of men in the deep, dense forest bordering the stream. His presence in the camp was hailed with joy, for these men were Dick's own followers. They were all young men and boys, who had won a name in the local history of the Delaware valley. They were the sons of patriot fathers, whose homes had been desolated by the ruthless hand of the enemy; and, fired with the spirit of patriotism and the passion of revenge, they had taken to the field, in defense of their country and their honor. They were a band of those fearless, dashing fellows, produced by the exigency of the times, of which Marion and Sumter will ever stand forward the most conspicuous in American history. But history is often partial, and fails to do justice to all deserving men. Such has been the case with our hero and his band.

Delaware Dick's men were all very plainly dressed. There was but one peculiarity about them. That was a pair of scarlet wings, taken from red birds, and worn upon the side of every hat. Wherever these badges went they were never forgotten, and to the Tory element, the names of Delaware Dick and his Scarlet Wings were synonymous with terror.

Dick dismounted, fed his horse, and partook of a hearty breakfast of hard biscuit and baked beans. In the meantime, he narrated his night's adventure at the old stone church and at Washington's head-quarters.

"And now," he continued, "I am on my way to Cornwallis's head-quarters."

An exclamation burst from the lips of his friends. "I am going as a spy," he continued, "at Washington's request."

"You will never return alive, Dick," said Roland Runkles. "The British camp will be full of Tories that will know you."

"It is a risk to run, friend Roll; but there is no sacrifice but what I am willing to make in behalf of our country. A spy must expect to meet dangers. But, boys, I want you to accompany me as far as you dare go."

To this all readily acquiesced, and in a few minutes the Scarlet Wings were moving up the Delaware.

The sun was up, but the air was keen and frosty.

The fingers of the little band tingled with cold.

Two hours' riding brought them to a road running almost parallel with their course. They concluded to take to the road, but before entering it, Delaware Dick dismounted, and creeping to a point where he

could command a view of the road in both directions, resolved to know whether the road was clear or not. To his surprise, he saw a horseman coming from the direction of Trenton. He was dressed in the uniform of the king's cavalry. He was a British dragoon.

"Fall back, boys, fall back," commanded Dick, "for here comes a British trooper. I will drop into company with him, and you can follow behind, though out of sight. Should I need your presence, I will call you. I dare say, he is a messenger carrying dispatches, either oral or written, from Trenton to Cornwallis; and if so, I'm going to have them at all hazards."

Delaware Dick mounted his horse, and rode away up the road at a slow pace.

The trooper soon came up with him, and, in a doubtful tone, demanded:

"Good-morning, sir stranger; for whom do you ride? The king or the rebels?"

"Do I look like a rebel, friend trooper? Do you think it very safe for rebels in Jersey nowadays?" answered our hero.

"Verily, the rebels and Tories, as the king's friends are called, dress alike, and are known only by the company they keep."

"Then, friend trooper, I shall be pleased to ride to Cornwallis's head-quarters with you."

"How know you that I go there?"

"I merely supposed so."

"Well, you are right; and as sure as my name is Conrad Kimball, I am glad of your company. I don't fancy meandering alone along here, for there's no telling what moment a dog of a Whig will bounce upon you."

Delaware Dick smiled.

The two rode on side and side through the crispy morn.

Delaware Dick conversed freely, but guardedly; and he soon discovered that his companion was no fool. He approached the trooper carefully, but, despite his skillful questioning, he failed to circumvent the wily red-coat. Dick, however, became satisfied of one thing—that the man was a bearer of dispatches to Cornwallis.

A couple of hours, ride brought them in sight of the fine residence of one Henry Bland, an old Tory of the deepest dye. This Delaware Dick knew. He had often seen the old man, yet was unknown to him.

"Yonder," said Dick, pointing ahead, "lives as warm old royalist as ever lived."

"Indeed?" rejoined the dragoon; "suppose, then, we stop, and warm, and get something to eat; for, by the prophets, I am as hungry as a bear and cold as an iceberg."

Dick consented, and they soon drew up before the house. The place denoted wealth and culture.

In answer to their summons, old Henry Bland appeared at the door. The uniform of the British soldier was sufficient to admit him, and the company he kept, to the old man's friendship.

"Be you friend or foe, old man, we want something to eat," said Dick, "for we are cold and hungry."

"And thirsty," added the trooper, facetiously.

Bland invited them in. Breakfast was over with, but the table was soon spread with a sumptuous meal, and the men invited to the board. A bottle of rare old brandy was placed before them. Both drank freely, or, at least, Dick appeared to. The trooper drank often, and he became merry under the happy influence of the liquor. He drank to every potentate of England, from the time of the Conquest down to George the Third. He finally became so confused in his ideas, that he drank to the health of friend and foe alike. Dick, too, became overpowered by his frequent draughts, and finally rolled to the floor in a sort of a drunken stupor.

"Too bad, (hic)" exclaimed the trooper, "t'see a young man in prime manhood (hic) let likker get 's best of 'm (hic) that way. I say, gov'nor, I a ways know when to quit (hic) 'dulgin' t' excess, I do (hic)."

Henry Bland made no reply, for the trooper rolled from his chair, dead drunk. Coming in, as they did, out of the cold to the warm room, and imbibing so freely of the brandy, they were overcome by the potent influence of the drink ere they were aware of the fact.

Bland swore like a pirate at the men for making beasts of themselves; but his words would have had as much effect upon stone statues. With the assistance of a male servant he removed the men into a wood-house, and left them to sober off. But scarcely had they left the building, ere Delaware Dick opened his eyes and gazed about him; and, finding the trooper snoring away in a drunken sleep, he rose to a sitting posture.

A smile of grim triumph was upon his face.

When assured that the trooper was not "playing possum," Dick arose, and began searching his pockets and clothes for papers. To his joy, he found a dispatch from Colonel Rahl, at Trenton, to Lord Cornwallis. It read:

"My Lord: Washington is near Trenton with a superior force. Would it not be advisable to send reinforcements here at once for fear of an attack?"

"Your obedient servant,

"COLONEL RAHL.

"LORD CORNWALLIS."

Dick's face became flushed with delight, as he glanced over this dispatch. He rose to his feet, sober as a judge. In fact, he had not been drunk at all. He had only embraced that opportunity to circumvent the trooper, after he had found that the love of liquor was a weakness of the royal soldier.

"This very paper will be my passport to Cornwallis's head-quarters. I will pass myself as a Tory and

unless some one should be about and identify me, the British will know no better."

He concealed the dispatch upon his person, stole out of the wood-house, found his horse, and mounting, galloped away.

The trooper lay drunk until noon, when he crawled out of the wood-house, blear-eyed and sick. When he found that he had been robbed of his dispatch, he mistrusted something of the real truth, and at once started on his journey. A short ways from the Bland residence, he was captured by a band of partisan rangers, wearing scarlet wings upon their hats.

Delaware Dick rode hard in the direction of Cornwallis's army, ignorant of the fact that the enemy were then on the march down the river. About noon he met the advance guard, and, being halted, was soon made acquainted with the situation. He informed the guard that he was direct from Trenton, with dispatches for the commander; and so he was at once escorted into the presence of Cornwallis, who, with his generals, was riding some distance in advance of the main column of his army.

Dick's heart beat wildly with fear when he found himself a spy in the enemy's camp. The presence of several Tories filled him with uneasiness, through fear of detection.

He introduced himself to Cornwallis as Abel Day, a scout and spy in the employ of Colonel Rahl. The general had heard of Abel Day incidentally, and as the youth told his story so straight, he had no grounds for mistrust.

"Sir," said the general, "what brings you here?" "I have come with a dispatch from Colonel Rahl," was Dick's answer, and he presented the purloined paper to the general.

At this juncture, our hero caught sight of a face that sent a chill of fear through his heart. It was the face of a young British officer—one that he had never seen before; and yet he became convinced, by the light in his eyes and the half-triumphant smile upon his face, that the officer recognized him.

Dick expected nothing else than exposure, and at once made up his mind to act accordingly; but, to his surprise and relief, the young officer turned away.

Cornwallis read the dispatch, then said:

"Colonel Rahl is afraid of Washington, and wants reinforcements. You can say to him, Abel Day, that he need have no fears of Washington or any other rebel."

"He also expressed an ignorance of your movements, general, which makes him more apprehensive of danger," remarked the young spy, with manifest indifference.

Cornwallis shot a quick, contemptuous glance at the youth, who fairly winced under the look.

"Tell Colonel Rahl that I do not make my plans known to every straggler and royalist in the colonies."

Here Dick met with a partial defeat that precluded further questioning and observations. He rode along in silence by the general's side, at the same time keeping a sharp watch on the young officer, whom he suspected of knowing him.

Finally the general ordered his return to Trenton, and called upon the young officer in question and a couple of dragoons to escort him beyond the advance guards.

The officer took a position at his side and they rode away, the two dragoons following behind.

Dick's heart almost ceased to beat. He felt assured that he was known to the officer, and how the interview was to terminate he knew not.

When alone upon the road the spell of silence was broken by the young officer, who, turning to the spy, said:

"Young man, do you know you are running a dangerous risk?"

Dick's face grew red and white by turns.

"You see I know you, Delaware Dick," he continued.

"I thought so, at least," answered our hero; "but why did you not expose me?"

"I am under obligations to you, Dick," he answered.

"For what?"

"I'll tell you at another time, if we should ever meet again."

Delaware Dick was completely astounded. Here was a bit of a mystery to him.

The officer who gave his name and rank as Clement Fairmont, captain of dragoons, soon left our hero to pursue his way alone, and ponder over the mystery that stood between him and the ignoble death of a spy.

Lord Cornwallis continued to advance down the Delaware in hopes of finding a good camping-ground, where he could wait until the ice bridged the river for him to cross over in pursuit of Washington.

As the day wore away the sky became overcast with gray, fleecy clouds, and a chill, damp wind from the north-west threatened a stormy December night. This made the British general more anxious to go into camp early, and so he sent a party of cavalry under one Colonel Von Baden to select a suitable place somewhere in advance.

Von Baden had not gone over two miles when he was attacked by a band of partisan rangers that were encamped in a log cabin, which stood on the roadside on the margin of a deep, dense woods. A sharp engagement ensued, when superior numbers triumphed, and the patriot rangers were driven off. Several of Von Baden's men were killed and wounded, and one of the provincials was slain and left on the field of battle. The badge found upon the hat of the latter told that he belonged to that noted band of Scarlet Wings, the followers of Delaware Dick.

Cornwallis coming up went into camp in the edge of the timber. He took possession of the cabin in which the Scarlet Wings had been ensconced, and

established his own quarters there. He found things quite comfortable in the deserted hut. The building was provided with an immense fire-place and wide-mouthed chimney. On the hearth a roaring fire was burning, and diffusing its warm glow throughout the whole room. The yawning fire-place was crammed with huge logs of hickory, that crackled and roared with a peculiar, cheerful song.

That the rebel band had intended to remain at the cabin during the night was evident from more than one fact: upon a rude table at one side were some smoking viands and a deck of cards. In one corner was a huge pile of wood, that had been recently prepared for the night. In the bottom of the pile was an immense back-log that, in addition to the one already in the fire, would have lasted a week.

Cornwallis was much pleased with his prepared quarters, and at once made himself at home. He first, however, had the building searched from cellar to garret for lurking enemies; but finding the coast clear, he divested himself of his military trappings, which he hung upon the wall, and then arranging his camp-chair, he seated himself before the cheery fire.

After supper had been served throughout the camp, and darkness had set in, Cornwallis dispatched an orderly to summon his generals to a brief council in the cabin.

In half an hour the generals were all present.

The wind rose, and, howling through the woods, rattled the clap-boards on the roof of the cabin, and rumbled in the great chimney.

The fire snapped and roared on the hearth, and the light danced and quivered over the staid and sober faces of the generals as they gazed into the crackling flame.

Thoughts of the dear ones at home far beyond the sea were brought up in the minds of the officers, as they gathered around the hearth. Faces were conjured up before their mental vision in the dancing flames.

"My lord," said a subordinate, addressing Cornwallis, "I am of the opinion that a rigorous winter is setting in. That wind blows like it."

"I hope you are a false prophet, general," replied Cornwallis, "for it would put an end to our victorious campaign, and give the enemy a chance to recruit his strength."

"Perhaps, in the present destitute condition of the American army, a severe winter would decimate its ranks more than our guns," said an officer.

"All but that," replied a fellow-soldier; "them Americans can stand more hunger, fatigue, and defeat than any people on the face of the earth."

"I'll admit," said Cornwallis, "that they have fortitude and endurance; but nature is somewhat the same in all men, and that there is a point where these attributes of brave men cease to be a virtue there is not a doubt. If we are to believe any of the reports that reach us through deserters, they can not hold out much longer. And now, what I wish to say is this: I have revised my plans of operation. I have determined to remain here until the Delaware freezes over, then cross into Pennsylvania, and attack Washington. If successful—and there is not a doubt but we will be—I shall march at once upon Philadelphia, where the rebel Congress is now sitting. With my forces divided up and posted at Trenton, Princeton, New Brunswick, and other points, I will be enabled to hold the Jerseys against any uprising element. In fact, a corporal's guard can maintain the peace here now. There is nothing to be feared from Washington, for he has been completely vanquished. I consider the revolt of the colonies virtually at an end in the Jerseys; and the expedition forming under Burgoyne in Canada, will soon possess Lake Champlain and all the upper country."

"Then it is to be understood that we remain here till the river freezes over?"

"Yes; we are in good quarters, and occupy a position that will lead Washington to think we have gone into winter-quarters."

Cornwallis's plans were approved by his generals, and, after some regulations for the army had been completed, the council broke up, and most of the generals sought their own quarters. Three, however, remained, and the deck of cards left by the patriots on the table suggesting a means of pastime, the four took their position around the table and began playing. For a seat, two of the players rolled the huge "back-log" lying in the corner out into the middle of the floor.

Over the cards and a bottle of rare old brandy purloined from a patriot cellar, the quartette passed the hours pleasantly.

Ever and anon, the fire was replenished from the supply in the corner. This was kept up until all but the huge "back-log," upon which the officers were seated, had been burned.

Without, the cold wind still frolicked in wild glee. Huge, damp snow-drops filled the air.

By ten o'clock, the whole camp was wrapt in silence and slumber. Only the weary pace of the cloaked sentinels outside, and the merry indulgence of the officers at head-quarters, broke the dead hush of the wintry hour.

About midnight the three generals took their departure for their own quarters, leaving the commander alone. He wheeled his chair around before the fire, and, stretching out his limbs, gazed reflectively into the glowing embers. The stern, martial bearing of his face told of the inner workings of the heart and mind. That he was fighting over his battles and recounting his victories, was evident from the wild flash of the eye and the smile of triumph that, now and then, broke the rigid austerity of his compressed lips. Vague thoughts came up in his mind. They carried him back to England, and, in

the quivering mass of fire before him, a thousand forms seemed gathering to do honor to the great conqueror.

The fire burned low. Only a subdued light from the glaring coals, that the general's capricious mind had peopled with lords and ladies come to do him honor, pervaded the room. Shadows at length began to gather like lurking assassins in the corners, and behind the tables and chairs.

The thoughts of the general finally grew sluggish. The effect of the brandy, the warm room, and the seductive silence began to draw him into the gentle embrace of slumber. He fell into a drowsy stupor—a doze.

The fire burned lower. The shadows deepened.

The wind whistled around the cabin, and banged the boards on the roof.

Still my lord slept on in his chair.

Suddenly there was a slight noise in the room; but Cornwallis did not hear it. Had he been awake, however, he would have seen a portion of the end of the huge back-log lying in the middle of the floor, pushed cautiously outward, revealing a black cavity within. And from the darkness of this cavity he would have seen a human face peer out—a face that was aglow with a wild and desperate look. It was a youthful face, and as the gray eyes swept the surrounding room and saw the general asleep in his chair, the lithe, active form of a man glided, like a worm from its chrysalis, out of the hollow "back-log." Then rising to his feet, the fearless young stranger drew a pistol, and pointing it at the general's heart, said, in a low tone:

"Wake up, my lord, you are my prisoner."

And the British general, starting from his sleep, found himself face to face with the redoubtable young patriot, Delaware Dick!

CHAPTER III.

BEARDING THE BRITISH LION.

"SILENCE, general, or by the love of liberty I will send a bullet through your heart," said our hero, as Cornwallis rose to his feet and faced his enemy at the dark, murderous tube leveled at his heart by a steady hand.

There was a look in Delaware Dick's eyes and meaning in his tone that seemed to transfix the general and hold him under a terrible fascination. He started back with surprise and terror, his eyes fixed upon the face of his enemy, as if held there by some diabolical enchantment.

"I've got the advantage of you, my lord," continued the young spy, "and I intend to hold it. One word loud enough to attract the attention of the guard I shall take as a signal for me to fire. Your death would be a great victory to the American people at this time; but I don't want to take it, unless you force me to it as an only means to save myself."

Cornwallis gradually recovered his composure as he became more fully cognizant of his situation. He recognized the face before him as that of the reputed British spy, Abel Day. He saw now that he had been deceived by this young partisan. But how had he gained admittance to the cabin? He ran his eyes around the room. He saw the great shell of a log on the floor, and its open end. It told the startling story—the young enemy had been concealed therein.

The British general felt for his trusty sword, forgetting that it hung upon the wall. But when he found he was unarmed, he inwardly cursed the fate that had kept them from throwing the great log upon the fire as they had the rest of the pile of wood. He saw through the whole of the young spy's game. It had been well played. The occupation of the cabin by the Scarlet Wings, the roaring fire on the hearth, the supply of fuel, including the big log in the corner—all had been arranged for the purpose of the spy working out his designs. His calculations had been well made, for nothing but mere conjecture could have led him to believe that the army would encamp there. Cornwallis did not know him self, an hour before he stopped, that this cabin would shelter him during the night.

"Sir," he finally said, though he spoke low, "you are a rebel spy—your life will pay the forfeit."

"I am Delaware Dick, my lord," answered the undaunted young patriot, "brother of Prodigal Tom, the Tory Spy."

Cornwallis shuddered inwardly. The name was familiar to him, and he knew that he confronted a foe worthy of his own steel.

The situation was a critical one to both the general and the spy. At any moment a soldier or an officer would be liable to enter the cabin, when, to Dick, escape would be out of the question; and at the same time he resolved, if discovered, that Cornwallis should die first.

To the latter the situation was humiliating in the extreme—he, an English lord and general, a captive in the hands of a boy, and that, too, in the very midst of his own army.

To Dick's last retort he said:

"Put down that weapon, if you expect the least mercy, sir."

"I expect none—I ask none. General, you are my prisoner. At least, you are in my power for the time being. If I die, you shall die with me. I will never be taken alive. This I swear by the Most High. You have the power to save my life and your own too. I will not remove this pistol from your heart till you comply with my request."

A contemptuous sneer passed over the face of the British general. He glanced toward his sword, then with his eye he measured the distance between him and the door.

There was nothing flattering in his situation.

The wind whistled, and the boards overhead rattled sharply.

"My lord," continued Delaware Dick, and his face assumed a more desperate and determined look, "every moment I stand here increases my danger. I desire to leave this cabin."

"Ah," said the general, sarcastically, "you now propose to ask terms of me."

"I shall ask that you pass me beyond your lines."

The general reflected.

"You must think I am a cowardly poltroon," he finally said.

"I think no such thing, my lord; but you can see exactly how we are situated, and you have either got to die or else comply with my demands. Remember, delay is dangerous to you, as well as myself. The moment that door-latch is touched by one from the outside, I will fire if I die the next moment for it. I will not hesitate to give my life for yours in the cause of liberty. After you have passed me beyond your lines, I will consider myself subject to capture, and that I will have no further claim on your protection. You know, general, as well as you stand there, that you are at my mercy, even though thousands of your men surround me. I might even shoot you down and then escape; but I wish to treat you as a man worthy of honor, and show you that I am not without honor myself."

"You know too much to leave here alive," said the general.

"Very well; if I die, so shall you. You're without a weapon, and one movement or word will be your death-warrant. I have offered you fair and honorable terms; and give you two minutes to accept or refuse them."

Cornwallis knew that Delaware Dick would keep his word. He saw that he was as desperate as he was brave, and, burning with humiliation, the commander threw his cloak about his shoulders, and said:

"Remember, Delaware Dick, that there is honor between enemies."

"I feel safe in trusting to your word; nor will I deceive you unless faith is first broken with me," replied Dick.

"Then come," and the British general turned to the door.

Delaware Dick took the commander's right arm, while with his right hand he held his cocked pistol in his bosom.

Thus the two passed out into the night.

The wind drove the snow and sleet into their faces; but with quick footsteps they passed along through the camp that lay wrapt in silence and gloom.

No one living would have believed that the haughty Lord Cornwallis would ever have submitted to such humiliating terms with an enemy, in the heart of his own camp. But no one, save those who have been placed in similar circumstances, could form any idea as to what they would do were they brought face to face with death. Cornwallis was but mortal, and the love of life strong within him. Were the order of things reversed, he would have done exactly as the spy did. It was the resort of a brave and desperate enemy.

On their way down the road they were stopped several times by the guard, who was unable to recognize the general in the darkness, but upon making himself known they were allowed to pass on. Finally they passed the outermost picket, when Cornwallis said:

"You are now beyond my lines."

"Then good-night, my lord," replied Dick, and the next moment he was hurrying down the road at the top of his speed.

Burning with mortification and anger, the British general turned and wended his way back to his quarters. Instead of sending a troop of horse after the daring young rebel, he resolved to keep the whole affair a secret that it might not become a matter of history by his own confirmation. As soon as he reached the cabin he rolled the hollow "back-log" into the fire, that daylight might find no vestige of it to reproach him, or to remind his brother officers of the night's adventure with the young stranger-spy, Delaware Dick.

CHAPTER IV.

DELAWARE DICK IN TROUBLE.

THE more Cornwallis thought over his adventure with Delaware Dick, the more his feelings became worked up, and in hopes of capturing the young rebel, he dispatched one Captain Danton with twenty mounted men in the direction of Trenton, with orders to bring every man into camp they might find on the way.

It was past midnight when Danton set out. The weather was cold and threatening. Clouds obscured the sky, and now and then a dash of snow and sleet made riding very disagreeable. Despite the inclemency of the weather, however, the British troopers continued on their way.

They had gone about ten miles when they were met by a man on horseback, who seemed to be in a great hurry.

Danton halted him, and inquired:

"Whither away, sir horseman?"

"To Cornwallis's camp; but I see you are royal troopers," answered the man, excitedly.

"Yes; and we have orders to arrest every man we find," replied Danton. "But what are you going to Cornwallis about?"

"I understand the officers of the crown have offered five hundred pounds for the capture of 'Delaware Dick,' the—"

"Yes; I believe they have," interrupted Danton; "but what about it?"

"Why, then, I, Dusen Tookbury, royalist, will have the reward."

"Then you must have the young rebel a prisoner."

"No; I haven't exactly got him in bonds; but I've

got him caged. He stopped an hour or two ago at the old Ben Hazen farm."

"You are sure of this?"

"Yes; I am," replied Tookbury, his teeth chattering with cold and excitement. "I was on the road when he turned into the lane going toward Hazen's; and knowing what an old rebel he is, I concluded to see who was going to his house at that time o' night. I slipped up to the window and seen old Hazen and Delaware Dick talkin' in the parlor."

"How far is it to Hazen's place?" asked Captain Danton.

"About four miles off the Trenton road—five miles from here. Prodigal Tom's off up that way somewheres, but, as I didn't know where exactly, I thought I'd gallop up to Cornwallis's head-quarters, and obtain assistance to take the young rebel, as he's likely to stay there till mornin'."

"Lead the way, and I'll see that you get your reward," said Danton.

"By St. Peter!" exclaimed the Tory, "I'm in luck for once. I expected to have to ride all the way to camp through this ugly weather."

Tookbury turned about, and led the trooper in the direction of Hazen's farm. Captain Danton rode at his side, and, naturally enough, the conversation centered upon Delaware Dick, and the inestimable good his capture would bring to the crown.

"I never learned until recently," said Danton, "that Prodigal Tom, the Tory, and Delaware Dick, the patriot, are brothers."

"I heard that long ago," answered Tookbury; "and they say Prodigal Tom is a warm friend of the king's—that he took all of his father's property after the old man's death, sold it, and, with the proceeds, equipped his company of partisan rangers. That's why they call him prodigal."

"Well, Prodigal Tom and Delaware Dick are both brave and desperate fellows," said the captain. "I have never seen either of them."

"I have seen Dick, but not Tom," said Tookbury.

"Neither of them is often seen. They seem to have a desire not to be personally known, or too conspicuous in the daylight; and, while they are arrayed against each other, I do not believe they would harm a hair of each other's head."

"All but that, captain," returned Tookbury; "boys that would fight each other at home, as they say these boys did, will fight on the battle-field. They say them boys alers war contrary as mules—that Tom joined the British just because Dick espoused the cause of the continentals."

"Well, Tom is making it lively for some of the rebel partisans, I assure you," said Danton.

And thus the conversation ran on for some length of time.

The little band of troopers rode slowly on through the dismal night toward the Hazen farm—so slow, indeed, that it was almost morning when they arrived in the vicinity of the farm.

The Hazens were already astir, for lights were shining from the windows.

Captain Danton and Tookbury left the command a short way from the house, and crept forward to reconnoiter. They had no difficulty in gaining a position near the parlor-window, through which they saw old man Hazen and his young guest seated before a roaring fire, engaged in conversation.

After having studied the face of the latter for a few minutes, Danton plucked his companion aside, and thus addressed him:

"Are you sure that is Delaware Dick, Tookbury?"

"I know it," was the positive answer of Tookbury.

"Then I have seen him before."

"Indeed?"

"I saw him yesterday in our camp."

"Ah! he was there as a spy, I assure you."

"He came with a dispatch from Colonel Rahl, at Trenton. No one mistrusted him of being anything else than a British courier."

"Oh! but he's a sly one, captain."

"At any rate, he must not escape," said Danton, and he at once gave orders for his men to surround the house. As soon as this was done, he advanced and rapped upon the door.

Benjamin Hazen and his young guest started with an exclamation of surprise. A look of uneasiness shaded the face of the latter. Hazen arose, and advancing to the door opened it, and demanded:

"Who's abroad so early?"

"Soldiers of his Majesty, King of England," was the response; "and we want the young rebel sojourning under your roof."

Turning to Dick, the old man exclaimed:

"Fly, Dick, fly for your life!"

"Too late; the house is surrounded," said our hero, who had seen the soldiers filing apart the window.

Captain Danton, and a number of soldiers led by the unprincipled Tookbury, burst into the room. Delaware Dick drew his trusty sword, placed his back against the wall, and, with the determination of selling his life dearly, awaited the result.

The rash and headlong Tookbury, anxious to be the first to lay hands upon the young spy in hopes of claiming the reward offered for his capture, rushed in upon him; but his life paid for his temerity. He fell dead under a blow, cloven to the jaw.

The sight of blood maddened the soldiers, and they pressed forward upon the young foe. A desperate struggle ensued. The sword of the young patriot flashed like gleams of lightning about his head, and the red-coats fell in numbers at his feet. A giant's strength seemed wielding the deadly weapon, and for a while the youth held his enemies at bay; but, at length, he met with a misfortune that decided the contest: his sword struck the heavy musket-barrel of a soldier and snapped in two; and the next moment, he was overpowered and bound.

But it had cost Danton dearly to take him. Three

of his men, besides Tookbury, lay dead, and four had been seriously wounded.

For a while after Dick's capture, the wildest excitement prevailed in the Hazen residence; but, as soon as quiet had been restored, Captain Danton dispatched a courier to Cornwallis with news of Dick's capture, and asking for a company of horse as an escort back to camp with the prisoner. He was afraid an attempt would be made to release the young spy by the patriot settlers.

The courier had been absent less than an hour, when he returned in hot haste with the startling intelligence that Delaware Dick's band of Scarlet Wings was encamped at the end of the lane on the Trenton road. This gave Danton great uneasiness, and, had he not been incumbered with the wounded men, he would have attempted to reach camp by a circuitous route. But he was too much of a soldier to desert his wounded, and so he resolved to fortify himself in the Hazen house, and endeavor to hold it until assistance could be procured.

The Hazens protested against the occupancy of their house, but in vain. Captain Danton promised that they should suffer no injury or insult from his command, so long as they made no attempt to endanger his situation.

Delaware Dick was disarmed and bound, then shut up in a little room without windows. A single door opening into the main apartment was the only way in or out of the room. It seemed as if it had been prepared on purpose for a domestic prison.

A guard was stationed at the door to prevent any one from communicating with the prisoner. The wounded were furnished with beds on the floor of the sitting-room, and their injuries looked after. It was found that the skill of a surgeon was sadly needed, for one of the troopers was dangerously if not mortally wounded.

Day finally dawned, cold, raw, and chilly. The guards, pacing their beats outside, swore and shivered. Fear of an attack by the Scarlet Wings kept them on the alert; and when it was suddenly reported that a horseman was approaching from the direction of Woodvale church, all was thrown into a state of excitement. But when the horseman, creeping down the road at a snail's pace, was recognized as a harmless old Indian, bundled up in a blanket and rags, all fears subsided, and turned to mirth and ridicule.

"It is Doctor Dave," said Mr. Hazen, as the Indian drew rein and dismounted in front of the house.

"And who's Doctor Dave?" asked Danton.

"A famous old Indian doctor, who has been traveling up and down the Delaware these forty years, administering to those who have faith with no little skill."

"Perhaps he can help my wounded men," said the captain.

"Herbs are his medicines, where the laying-on-of-hands, as some call it, fails to reach the case."

"Well, he's coming in," said Danton, "and it will do no harm, if it does no good, to call on him for assistance."

Doctor Dave moved slowly and cautiously toward the front door, his eyes apparently never moving from the path before him. He was admitted to the house by Mr. Hazen, and although a number of soldiers were in, he was not in the least disconcerted by their presence. He was an odd-looking old genius—a full-blood Indian, speaking the English language fluently, when he spoke at all. He seemed to prefer hearing to being heard, and answered a question by a shake or a nod of the head where words were not required. He must have been sixty years of age. His hair was white; his face furrowed, and his body slight and infirm.

"They tell me you are a doctor, old man," Captain Danton said, when he had been seated before the fire.

The Indian nodded his head, as he stretched out his thin, bony hands to the warm glow of the fire.

"We have some wounded men here," continued the officer, "and if you can aid them, I would like for you to do so."

Having warmed his feet and hands, Doctor Dave signified his readiness to attend to the British officer's request, and was at once conducted into the room where the wounded men lay.

The latter greeted the old man with a look of contempt; but red-man was used to such salutations, and at once went about his work in a manner that was calculated to inspire confidence in the breasts of the spectators and wounded troopers. He carefully dressed the wounds, applied some salve to the cuts and ointment to the bruises; and soon all but one were forced to confess great relief from his treatment. The exceptional case, however, was a man suffering of a contusion of the brain; but the old doctor did not despair of relieving him. When all else had failed, he seated himself, and taking the suffering man's head upon his lap, began running his hands in slow and regular passes over his head from each ear to the crown.

At first there were some inclined to scoff at this part of the red-man's treatment as a superstitious incantation; but when the agonized moans of the trooper subsided, and he sunk into a quiet slumber under the influence of the old doctor's mesmerism touch, they looked upon him as one possessed of great and unnatural powers.

When the wounded soldiers had all been cared for in a satisfactory manner, the old doctor was taken into the kitchen by Mr. Hazen and given a sumptuous breakfast. After the repast he was allowed the privilege of the house, and being no stranger to the Hazens, he took liberties which would not have been tolerated in a stranger. He wandered about the house from room to room—up stairs and down—looking with eyes and senses all alert—for what end will be seen hereafter.

CHAPTER V.

PRODIGAL TOM APPEARS.

For hours the old Indian sat silently smoking and nodding drowsily before the cheery glow of the fire. The wounded soldiers still rested easy under the relief he had given them.

Meanwhile Captain Danton waited patiently for the return of his courier with an escort from Cornwallis. His fears of the Scarlet Wings had been increased when he learned that the negro cow-boy had not returned with Pat from the field. He believed he had been sent away to raise the alarm, and bring succor to the relief of Delaware Dick. But both Hazen and Pat denied sending him away. They stated that fear of the soldiers kept him away.

Thus the hours wore away, and as noon approached a cup of coffee, some buttered rolls, fried ham and warm biscuits were placed upon a tray by the good Mrs. Hazen, who requested that the same be conveyed to Delaware Dick, as he had had no breakfast. Captain Danton, whose gallantry and humanity added much to his soldierly qualifications, complied with her request, and with the provision passed into the prison-room.

In a moment he returned with the tray and provision untouched. His face wore a look of bitter disappointment, and his hands trembled.

"Why have you brought the food back?" Mrs. Hazen asked.

"Because, my good woman, there is no one in that room to eat it. Delaware Dick has escaped."

He put the tray down, and going out gave the alarm. In a moment the wildest excitement prevailed. Hazen and all of his servants were arrested for complicity in his escape.

The old Indian doctor, still drowsing by the fire, was the only person that received the news with indifference.

Dick had escaped by way of the cellar, having cut a hole through the floor of his prison and let himself down.

"Who knows but what the nigger that crept out of the cellar this morning and failed to return from the field was Delaware Dick himself?" asked a soldier.

"Impossible," replied Danton; "he was a genuine negro."

Search was at once instituted for the escapee/prisoner. The afternoon was passed in a vain search for him. In the meantime, Doctor Dave had stolen as silently away as an Arab. His disappearance caused considerable unfavorable comment among the troopers.

Evening approached, and no word from camp had yet been received. Danton resolved to return under cover of the night. He was already preparing to depart when a dozen horsemen drew up before the door. They were Tories, and led by the notorious Prodigal Tom, brother of Delaware Dick.

Danton and his men were rejoiced to meet the young Tory who, being in a hurry, refused to dismount, but, in the gray of the winter evening, held a short conversation with the captain. They talked about Dick and his escape.

"I could have told you, captain," said Tom, "that nothing but an iron or stone prison would hold Delaware Dick. I have known him from a child, and should I ever capture him, I will keep a line of bayonets around him and watchful eyes upon him, until I know he is in a place of safety, which place, I am afraid, is not short of the grave."

"I am satisfied he had assistance in getting away from us," said Danton. "I have Hazen and his servants under arrest, accused of aiding him."

"They might have helped him," replied Tom, "though I doubt it very much; and I would not do the Hazens violence on strength of my suspicions, were I in your place."

After some further conversation, Prodigal Tom and his band departed, going north.

"Brother against brother," said Captain Danton, "and I never heard two voices sound so near alike as those of Delaware Dick's and Prodigal Tom's. I could not see Tom's features in the dark, but if they resemble Dick's as does his voice, one might easily be taken for the other."

"Who knows but they are one and the same?" said a soldier.

"No one knows it; for such a thing is preposterous. But hark!"

Even as he spoke, the report of firearms smote upon the ears of the party. The sound came from the north, and that Prodigal Tom was in trouble Danton had not a doubt, and in a moment he was moving at the head of his men to the assistance of his friends.

As they were thundering down the road in the young star-light, a horseman, wrapped in a blanket, swept past them like the wind.

"Did you see that, captain?" asked a trooper.

"I'd been blind not to; and by the royal crown it was that old Indian doctor! Boys, there's something wrong about that Doctor Dave—he is in league with Delaware Dick!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE BATTLE OF TRENTON.

GENERAL WASHINGTON waited with some impatience the return of Delaware Dick from the British camp. It was not the want of information from the enemy's quarters that made him uneasy and impatient, but fear of Dick's safety. His men around him did not fail to notice the feeling of unrest that agitated his breast; but none of them knew the real cause, for none of them knew that Delaware Dick, the Wing-of-the-Wind, was one of his most important spies.

On Christmas-eve, however, Dick returned, to the general's great relief and joy, after an absence of two days and nights.

When alone with the young patriot in his private room, the commander said:

"Well, Dick, I had about given you up as lost this time."

"I have had some close figuring, general, since I left you," Dick answered. "I have not only been in the enemy's camp, but a prisoner in their hands. A party of troopers captured me at Ben Hazen's house, and placed me in prison there; but with the assistance of that mysterious 'power behind the throne,' I was enabled to effect my escape. But, general, since my departure I have learned that Colonel Rahl is stationed at Trenton with about fifteen hundred German troops, and he is in mortal fear of you. But Cornwallis sent him word that he need not fear you—that a corporal's guard would hold you in check. This I learned by acting as self-constituted courier from Rahl to Cornwallis."

"What is the strength and disposition of the rest of the British army under Cornwallis?" asked the general.

"Some are at Princeton, some at New Brunswick, some at other points, and one division under his own immediate command. This I received from his own lips. Anticipating his movements, I concealed myself, with the assistance of my men, in a hollow 'back-log,' in a deserted cabin on the Trenton road. We had a pretty good idea that Cornwallis would encamp at that point; and as the cabin was the only building in the vicinity, we felt satisfied the general would occupy it. To make it more attractive, we built a roaring fire on the hearth, taking care to put on a 'back-log' that would last a week. Then we laid in a big supply of wood, in the bottom of which, with ends cunningly blocked up, was placed the hollow log in which I was ensconced. Sure enough, the army camped right there, and Cornwallis took possession of the cabin; and what surpassed my most sanguine hopes, he called a council that night. I heard it all."

"Then you learned the course he will pursue?" said the commander, his countenance beaming with joy.

"Yes; as soon as the Delaware freezes over he will cross into Pennsylvania, rout you and march upon Philadelphia. He has no doubt of his ability to do this, for he considers you vanquished."

"Let him remain over-confident," said Washington, "for self-assurance often begets defeat in time of war. I shall strike a blow unexpected to him. Tomorrow is Christmas-day—a great holiday to the German people—and as the Hessians stationed at Trenton have been assured that they have nothing to fear of me, they will doubtless give up to festivities and merry-making, and finish up with a drunken carousal at night. Then will be my time to strike; and should we succeed in carrying the town, our victory will be, in a measure, owing to you, my boy; for without the information you have given me, I would never have dared to undertake such a movement. But something has got to be done to remove the gloom and despondency into which the public mind has fallen, owing to our late reverses. Dick, are you acquainted with the country around Trenton?"

"I know it to perfection, general," was the answer.

"Here, then, is a map. Will you give me some information regarding the country back of the town and along the river below it, say, for ten miles?"

"With pleasure, general," and Delaware Dick gave the information in a clear, comprehensive manner.

After some further conversation Washington dismissed his young spy, and sat down to complete his arrangements for the Christmas party at Trenton; and thus he spent most of the entire night. But he was astir early on the morning of the 25th, as were the soldiers also; for it had become known throughout the camp that an attack was to be made on the Hessians at Trenton.

Of the splendid achievement that followed on the terribly cold night of December 25th, all our school histories tell us. It was a complete surprise to the British and their German emissaries—the advance of Cornwallis's army holding Trenton, and Rahl, the commander, was among the prisoners taken. He was mortally wounded; and before retiring again to the Pennsylvania side of the river, Washington, accompanied by Delaware Dick and two of his aids, visited the wounded man. When they entered the house and were admitted to the presence of the stricken colonel, they found a surgeon and a young British officer in attendance upon him. Washington saluted them, not as a conqueror, but as a generous and kind-hearted fellow-man. The young officer advanced toward Dick, and, taking him by the hand, said:

"Good-evening, Richard Melinott!"

Dick started at the words. It had been many a day since he had heard his right name spoken; and coming, as it did, from the lips of a British officer it filled him with surprise. He fixed a searching look upon the officer's face. He had seen the face before, but could not recall the time and place when and where it was.

"Sir, you have the advantage of me," our hero replied.

"You have forgotten Captain Clement Fairmont, who escorted you beyond Cornwallis's lines, the other day?"

"Not at all, captain!" exclaimed Dick, as a light of recognition flashed in his eyes.

Then the two withdrew into an adjoining room and conversed.

"You have won a signal victory to-night, Dick," Fairmont said.

"It was a glorious victory, captain," returned our hero, enthusiastically.

"I presume your visit to our camp had something to do with it," observed the king's officer.

"It is a mystery to me, captain," said Dick, evasively, "why you ever permitted me to leave your lines as you did, unless you have not the cause of your king at heart."

The young officer smiled.

"I am loyal to my king, Dick, as far as my heart will allow me to be," he said, toying with the hilt of his sword. "But, Dick, I have known you some time, and why shouldn't I when you have won the heart of her to whom I am betrothed?"

Dick started as though a cannon had been discharged near his ear. His face colored, and a look slightly touched with scorn passed over it.

"Captain Fairmont," he exclaimed, "you speak in riddles."

Before the captain could answer, one of Washington's aids announced their readiness to depart from the house, and as Dick turned to the door, Fairmont said, in an undertone full of strange meaning:

"Never mind, Richard Melinott; I may soon demand honorable satisfaction of you."

Dick's face grew almost livid; but the presence of Washington prevented him from replying to Fairmont as his feelings dictated.

A parole was made out for Captain Fairmont, as well as the rest of the officers captured; then Washington and his friends left the house and rejoined the army.

CHAPTER VII.

A ROGUE'S PLOT AND A PATRIOT'S REVENGE.

"BEG parding, massa, but the young missus wishes to see you."

Delaware Dick raised his eyes. A darkey, with hat in hand, stood by the roadside, in front of a tall wooden building, known as the Half-way Inn. It was rather a forbidding-looking place, and Wing-of-the-Wind eyed the darkey with evident mistrust. He had always heard that the keeper of the Half-way Inn was a violent Tory, and thought it rather strange that he should be wanted there by his wife. In fact, Dick had become a little suspicious. He had just escaped a very network of dangers. Having made a tryst at Melross farm with Agnes, he had kept it at imminent hazard, only to learn that Agnes was not Richard Melross's daughter but his niece, and that she was soon to return to England. He was sick at heart over this separation; and had been, too, unfortunate enough to lose in his hard run for life from British Bill's gang, the little memorandum-book in which her new address was written.

It was riding slowly onward after his escape from Bill, and another race with a squadron of dragoons, that he was arrested by the sound of the negro's voice.

"The young mistress?" the spy exclaimed. "What does she want?"

"Don't know, massa; she jist come here little while ago, and seeing you come up the road, told me to tell you dat she want to see you. I don't mean ole missus; I mean Miss Agnes Melross, I does. She in de house."

Without another word Delaware Dick dismounted, and, giving the reins to the darkey, approached the house. He felt satisfied that the black told the truth, although it seemed impossible for Agnes to have come to the inn since their parting at the Hawk's Nest.

He was admitted to the house by the innkeeper's wife, and, as he crossed the threshold, two men sprung from behind the door, and seizing him, pinioned his arms at his side, while a third man appearing, proceeded to disarm him.

"Caught at last, you infernal young rebel!" the innkeeper hissed. "It was a clever thing that I knew of your love for Miss Agnes Melross, and that there was a witness to your interview at the Hawk's Nest. I'll give you free lodgings for a while, my fine fellow."

He was at once conducted up a pair of stairs and into a small, gloomy apartment from which there seemed no escape, save by the way he entered.

"Stay in there, my gay cavalier," said Ben Darling, the innkeeper, "till I can send word to Cornwallis of your capture. He's offered a reward, I understand, for your head, cold or hot."

"Just so," thought our hero, as the heavy door closed upon him; "but, in the first place, I was a fool for being entrapped, and I suppose I will have to take the consequences. Still, when that nigger mentioned Agnes's name as he did, I couldn't help but believe him."

Pondering over the matter, Dick glanced around the room. A bed in one corner and a long wooden bench constituted the supply of furniture. There was no window in the walls; but a small square hole, intended as such, had been cut in the side facing the road. It was not over eight inches square, and was the only source of light furnished the room.

Dick walked to this opening and gazed out. The first thing his eye fell upon was the treacherous darkey leading his horse into the stable across the road. He glanced down the highway, and discovered a carriage coming up toward the inn. A driver in livery occupied the front box, while a colored footman was perched upon the rear seat. Altogether, it was a stylish and aristocratic turnout for that day; and, as it drew nearer, the prisoner saw that it was an ancient affair, whose gilded panels bore the English coat-of-arms and other figures of heraldry emblazoned upon them. This convinced him that it belonged to some old Englishman, and, no doubt, a royalist, who adhered to the ancient carriage as a relic of the pristine glory of his house with the devotion of an old friend. He kept his eyes upon it, feeling almost certain that it bore some British general or royal colonial officer; but

as it drew nearer, he was surprised to see that it contained only an old man and a veiled woman.

The carriage turned in and stopped in front of the inn. The driver and footman both dismounted, and while the former was engaged in watering the horses, the latter opened wide the carriage-door. The old man got out, straightened his limbs, and began pacing to and fro in front of the house. He was a fussy old gentleman, in knee-breeches, silken hose, and shoes with golden buckles. After parading the length of the door-yard a time or two, he hopped into the carriage again.

Meanwhile the lady remained closely veiled, but as the driver mounted his seat and touched up the horses, a gust of wind swept through the carriage, and, throwing back the veil, revealed to the astonished gaze of Delaware Dick the lovely face of his betrothed, Agnes Melross, gazing toward him from the carriage window.

A cry rose to the young patriot's lips, but before his tongue could give utterance to it, the carriage with, his darling Agnes passed from view down the road.

Sick almost at heart, he was about to turn aside, when he happened to see a horseman approaching at a slow, swinging gallop, from the direction of Trenton. This held his attention, and closely scanning the stranger, he tried to make out who he was. But in this he failed. He saw that the man was dressed in a citizen's suit of home-spun; but, for all this, there was a military air about his deportment that convinced Dick that he was upon some official duty for either the patriot or royal cause.

As he came nearer, Dick saw that he was going to stop at the inn; and had he been certain of the man's friendliness to the cause of freedom, he would have warned him of danger, as he could easily have made himself heard. Being ignorant, however, of his political sentiments, he remained still. The man rode up to the door of the Half-way Inn, dismounted, and, giving his horse into the charge of a man, ordered him watered and fed; then he entered the house.

Dick saw no more, and turning from the window he seated himself upon the bench and gave way to mental reflections. He could hear the murmur of voices in the room below, and as they gradually grew louder, and some of the words audible, he bent his ear and listened. He soon discovered that there was a difference of opinion between the host and his guest, and words that had at first seemed charged with the animation of a friendly dispute, finally became pitched in tones of anger and rage. The epithets of Tory and rebel were exchanged in the heat of fury and passion. Then followed the sounds of a lively scuffle. Blows and oaths resounded from cellar to garret. The rush and trample of feet, the crash and fall of furniture, and the yells of the combatants and screams of a woman shook the house to its very foundation.

Dick knew that the stranger was a patriot and had been entrapped like himself; and he fairly chafed in spirit to think that he was powerless to aid him. The sounds of the conflict lasted, however, but a few moments when a ringing yell from a dozen throats announced the victory of the Tories. And presently the sound of footsteps and fierce, angry voices were heard coming up the stairs. A key was inserted in the prison-door and turned. The door was then pushed open and the man dragged into the room with Dick.

"There, you infernal big rebel," hissed the innkeeper, whose face had been pounded almost into a shapeless mass, "lay there till the devil, your master, comes after you."

Then the door was closed and locked upon them.

Dick glanced at the form of the stranger. He saw that he was a man of powerful frame. His face was smoothly shaven, yet bore the marks and scars of many a rough encounter. It was brown, almost, as an Indian's, but wore the expression of a brave and fearless character.

Turning, as the door closed upon him, the huge stranger smote the heavy oaken door with his ponderous fist, and in a tone as deep and thunderous as the roar of a lion, exclaimed:

"Curse you, you Tory fiends! by all the saints, living and dead, I will tumble earth upside down but what I have revenge on you! I'll show you that Old Sanguinity is not a coward nor a suckling, if ten of you did get the best of him in a hand-to-hand skirmish. Hurrah for Liberty! George Washington! and the Continental Congress!" and the giant gave three lusty cheers that seemed to issue from iron lungs.

"Stranger," said Delaware Dick, advancing and taking the man by the arm, "you are not alone in here."

"I am not, by the prophets of old," he exclaimed, his expression of rage and anger melting into a look of surprise and astonishment. "It is so dark in here, and I was so infernal mad that I could see nothing. Who are you?"

"Delaware Dick."

"Great shockin'!" burst from the man's lips; "you Delaware Dick, the Wing-of-the-Wind, and in such a plight? Give me your hand, Delaware, for I'm dyin' glad to meet you; but I'd heap rather it was upon a victorious battle-field. Delaware Dick," added the stranger, in a low, earnest tone, "I am Old Sanguinity, and when my enemies will stand square before me, there is nary God if I can't whip just six of them at once, and keep it up all day. I don't expect to die in this pen, Delaware—no, by the gods of Mount Olympus, NO! I will live, in spite of fate, to crush into pulp to light perdition's fires with the face of the British captain that struck me in the room below. Yes, I do solemnly swear, that I will exterminate that wretch, and—hurrah for Trenton! George Washington! and Liberty!"

"Is there a British officer below?" asked Dick.

"Yes, and seven or eight soldiers."

"I saw none when I entered. They must have come since I was put in here; and friend Sanguinity, their presence makes our situation a rather hopeless one."

"We're caged, that is true, Dick; but I swear by all the saints, from the flood down to Plymouth Rock, that the morning's sun will find me dead, or else out of here. I'll tear the accursed log-pile down over my head, as Sampson did the temple. I'll smite them hip and thigh. The curse of Old Sanguinity shall fall upon them like a withering, blighting scourge."

The prisoners now proceeded to examine their situation. The room in which they found themselves was not large, though as firm and compactly built as if it had been intended expressly for a prison. Aside from the door and the little square hole in the wall, there was no other opening in the apartment; while from the loft floor to the roof, at the lowest side, it was about twelve feet. The bar-room of the inn was directly under them, and thus the prisoners could hear the clinking of glasses and the voices of the drinkers.

The hours dragged along, and finally darkness fell. Some coarse food and a pitcher of water were sent up to the prisoners. A guard was stationed at the head of the stairs; another was stationed outside in front of the house, and one out in the road.

Thus guarded, Captain Carl Von Coellu felt that all necessary precaution had been taken to insure them against surprise; and resting under this conviction, he and several of his men accepted an invitation to spend the evening with Ben Darling, the host, in celebrating the capture of Delaware Dick.

They took possession of the bar-room. Darling brought up a supply of the best liquors in his cellar, and then a general indulgence prevailed until supper was announced, when Captain Von Coellu and his men passed out into the dining-room, leaving their arms, their liquor and unfinished pipes lying upon the bar-room table.

The meal spread was a sumptuous one compared with the rude fare of a soldier; and the Hessian captain and his men tarried long at the board; but when the half-intoxicated gourmands at last returned to the bar-room to finish their pipes, they were not a little surprised to find that some one had been tampering with their effects. A full bottle of Madeira, the captain's sword and a brace of fine pistols had been spirited away. The guard stationed outside swore that no one had even looked inside the bar-room since the party had gone out to supper. The captain and his men, as well as their host, were certain that no one had entered the room from a back way, as they would have to pass through the kitchen to do so; and since no one could descend from above, nor rise up from below, the absence of the articles seemed involved in no little mystery.

Furious over the loss of his sword, the captain plunged out into the night, followed by his men with fixed bayonets, and began a close and thorough search of the premises. They shouted and swore furiously, and with as much incaution as though they were miles from an enemy.

To add to their indignation and rage, Old Sanguinity set up a series of mocking yells and groans, which he kept up until the drunken captain had been provoked to a feeling of deadly violence. And turning suddenly, he started toward the house, exclaiming:

"I'll be accursed if I don't drink that rebel's life-blood!"

He disappeared in the bar-room. He was alone, and no one essayed to follow him.

The host and the soldiers kept up their search outside, and the big rebel prisoner his cries of derision up-stairs.

Finally those outside were startled by the dull report of a pistol and a frightful groan in the bar-room. They all made a rush for the house.

The tallow-dip that had been left burning in the bar-room was now spluttering in its brazen sconce, and giving but a dim, flickering light. A thousand weird, fantastic figures seemed writhing and posturing on the floor and shaking their grotesque forms upon the wall.

The smell of burnt powder pervaded the room.

A soldier, rushing headlong into the apartment, ran plump against something suspended from the ceiling. It was a human form, swaying to and fro.

A cry of agony burst from every soldier's lips, for as he glanced up at the face, upon which was frozen all the repulsive horrors of death, he recognized that of Captain Von Coellu!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BLOW OF AN UNSEEN HAND.

CAPTAIN VON COELLU was dead. The purple color of his face; the protruding tongue; the starting eyeballs, and the round bullet-hole in his forehead, were evidence of a fact that was undeniable. The slip-noose of a small rope encircled his neck, the other end being made fast to a cross-piece that had been nailed to the underside of two of the joists. He had been hung, and then shot by the hand of unknown enemies!

The soldiers stood speechless with terror, gazing with distended eyes around them and upon the lifeless form before them.

But, arousing at length, as from a frightful dream, the body of Captain Von Coellu was cut down and laid out in the bar-room. Only the massive tread, and deep, complaining voice of the huge prisoner in the loft broke the awful stillness.

The soldiers, now headed by Ben Darling, began searching for the captain's slayer. And every room, save that in which Delaware Dick and Old Sanguinity were incarcerated—from cellar to garret, was ex-

amined; but not one trace of an enemy could be found.

The body of Captain Von Coellu was laid out in a bed-room, and a soldier placed as a watcher by the corpse.

The light was removed from the bar-room to the kitchen, wherein the host and his royal friends now assembled. A restlessness, however, pervaded the spirits of all, and some kept pacing in and out of the house continually.

Suddenly those in the kitchen heard a stifled groan, and the fall of a body in the bar-room. A look of horror convulsed every face, and, for a moment, the astounded party stood silent and speechless. Then Sergeant Eukers seized a light, and, followed by his men, entered the bar-room, where, in the middle of the floor, they found a soldier lying dead, with his head cloven to the jaw.

"Oh God!" burst from the innkeeper's lips; "he's been smitten down by that invisible hand! Men!—soldiers of the king!—you must leave here. You have brought the curse of God into my house. Go! before we are all slain."

A deep, sonorous laugh grated mockingly upon their ears; and the voice of Old Sanguinity came down like a thunderbolt from above.

"Go strangle that infernal big rebel; let us retaliate," cried Sergeant Eukers, fierce with rage and anger.

The next moment, the sergeant stood alone. His men, led by the infuriated Ben Darling, rushed out into the hall, and up the rickety stairs.

Alone in the subdued light of the bed-chamber, the officer gazed around. He lifted his eyes, only to behold the face of a man in the ceiling—the face of an avenging spirit! Then there was a flash as of lightning across the face of the darkness—a livid flash, and a dull blow, and the sergeant fell dead.

Then from the darkness above the form of a man descended. It was the form of Old Sanguinity; and, in a moment, Delaware Dick stood at his side. In the hand of the big rebel was a sword stained with blood—the sword of Captain Von Coellu, that had disappeared from the table while the soldiers were at supper.

The taunter of the soldiers at the door up-stairs that the prisoners had fastened on the inside, warned the two daring patriots that their escape would soon be discovered, and turning, they opened the door, and plunged out into the night. A sentinel challenged them—a blow followed, and the soldier fell.

"This way, Delaware Richard," ordered the big rebel, leading the way across the road toward the stable.

In a few minutes more, they were mounted and fleeing from the scene of their night's adventure.

When Ben Darling and the soldiers forced their way into the prison-room, they were met with a terrible disappointment. The rebels had escaped, and a broad plank in the floor being up told their way of egress! There was the identical bottle that had disappeared from the table below, minus its contents. The bed had been tumbled on to the floor, and the cord taken from the bedstead. A piece of it, with a slip-noose at one end, and encircling the neck of the bottle, told how the wine, the sword, and the pistols had been purloined from the table. Further investigation revealed the startling fact that Captain Von Coellu had been hung with a piece of the same rope. A noose had been dropped over his head while passing under the opening; then he had been drawn up and shot, and before his friends could reach the room, the plank had been slipped back to its place, and all "traces of the source of his death concealed."

The fury of the Hessians and the host of the Half-way Inn knew no bounds; and when they found that the sergeant, and the sentinel out in the road, had fallen victims to the patriots' vengeance, they became transformed to madmen.

In the heat of their fury, a band of Tory partisans dashed up to the door of the inn and dismounted. The leader advanced to the door and without ceremony opened it and entered.

"Prodigal Tom! Prodigal Tom!" burst from half a dozen throats in tones of wild delight.

"Prodigal Tom," said Ben Darling, advancing toward the young Tory leader, "why in heaven's name couldn't you have come sooner?"

"Why so, Ben Darling?"

"Your rebel brother, Delaware Dick, was a prisoner in my house not over two hours ago. So was a big rebel, calling himself Old Sanguinity, and, friend Tom, I am ashamed—"

"One word, friend Darling," interrupted the partisan, "was this big rebel, of whom you speak, dressed in citizen's clothing, and mounted upon a large, bay steed?"

"Even so, Prodigal Tom," answered mine host.

"And he escaped?"

"With your brother, Delaware Dick."

A look of disappointment clouded Prodigal Tom's face.

"Do you know who he was?"

"Yes; and I am sorry, indeed, that he escaped, for he was the notorious Virginia wagoner, General Dan Morgan!"

CHAPTER IX.

PRODIGAL TOM AT HEAD-QUARTERS.

TOM and his men were entertained right willingly and courteously by the innkeeper, and day was just breaking when their entertainment was suddenly arrested by the cry:

"To arms! to arms! a body of provincial horse is upon the road!"

"To your saddles, men! to your saddles!" shouted Prodigal Tom, rushing out of the inn, and mounting his horse.

In a minute every man was in the saddle. Prodi-

gal Tom's band numbered just twenty sabers, and as the body of provincials approaching consisted of but ten men, the Tory felt certain of an easy victory.

The enemy soon made their appearance rather incautiously from the woods north of the inn, and before they were aware of the proximity of foes, they received a volley from Prodigal Tom's men. Singular as it may seem, however, not a patriot was touched; and without as much as slackening their speed, they charged the Tories. A sharp and deadly struggle ensued, and for a moment it seemed that victory would crown the efforts of the patriots; but the death of their leader turned the tide, and those that were not slain were taken prisoners.

This victory added new laurels to the fame of Prodigal Tom, and as the news of the conflict spread through the country, his name added new terrors to the peace of the patriots.

Ben Darling's inn now became converted into a hospital for both patriot and Tory wounded, and the innkeeper and his wife were intrusted with their care. Fortunately for them, however, that old Indian nomad, Doctor Dave, came along soon after the fight, and being called in by Prodigal Tom, rendered good surgical aid to the suffering men.

Prodigal Tom left the inn shortly after the battle, and about noon reached the British army under Cornwallis. When presented to the general in his private apartment, the young Tory appeared as though half doubtful of the reception that would be given him. Nor was he altogether disappointed in the stern reticence of the man. Cornwallis, as he took the young partisan's hand, gazed into the youth's face with a look that manifested surprise; and he even seemed to recoil from him, as though an intuitive doubt had suddenly entered his mind.

The young partisan, however, appeared calm in the august presence of the English general, and conducted himself in a very easy, yet formal manner, that seemed to relieve the stiff disciplinarian of his hesitation and reticent demeanor.

"Prodigal Tom," he said, in measured tones, "it affords me pleasure to meet you for the first time, though to me, and in fact to your enemies, you are well known by reputation. The service you rendered Sir Henry Clinton as a spy, is all the recommendation I desire of your faithfulness to the crown. But when I first got a glimpse of your face, I could not help remarking to myself the resemblance you bore to your rebel brother, Delaware Dick."

"Then, you have met my brother Dick, general?" Tom said.

The general and the youth were alone, and yet, when Tom put this question, the commander glanced quickly around him, as his meeting with Delaware Dick at the cabin forced itself with burning humiliation upon his recollection. But affecting a stern indifference, he answered:

"Yes, he came into our lines a few days before the capture of Trenton, bearing genuine dispatches from Colonel Rahl. As no one recognized him, and his papers were genuine and his story plausible, there was not the shadow of a thing by which to mistrust him of being a spy. Since that time, however, I have found that he was Delaware Dick, Washington's spy and scout."

"How did you discover the fact, general?" asked Prodigal Tom.

"By the merest accident," was the evasive reply, that brought a faint smile to the sensual lips of the young Tory.

"Dick is a wily rebel, my lord; and but for a rebel petticoat he would be with us to-day."

"It is love, then, that made him a rebel?"

"Yes, your excellency."

"Out of respect to you, Thomas, I should be sorry to ever take him as a spy."

"He certainly knows the consequence, my lord; and while I hold all the respect and love of a brother for him, I shall not flinch one iota from my duty to my king, nor endeavor to prevent his capture and punishment as a spy. In fact, my lord, I am here to make a statement of the partisan warfare that is going on outside, and to solicit of you sufficient force to drive the rebel element out of the country."

"My dear sir," said the general, thoughtfully, "I cannot spare a man, horse nor foot, now. I am upon the eve of a great battle. I shall attack Washington soon, for his victory over Rahl has emboldened him to such a degree as to induce him to recross into New Jersey and take a position near Trenton. After I have accomplished my present designs against the enemy, I shall send out an adequate force to subdue the bands of rebel partisans, and compel the citizens to return to their allegiance to the king."

"I can afford to wait, my lord," Prodigal Tom replied, knitting his beetling brows and dropping his eyes to the ground, as if plunged in momentary reflection.

The young Tory leader was in private consultation with the general for an hour or two; and when he finally left his quarters and strolled out into the camp, he found his men enjoying the hospitality of the British soldiers. He was received on every hand with marked respect, and as he sauntered leisurely along, he was finally approached by a young officer, who addressed him thus:

"I beg your pardon, Prodigal Tom, for my interruption; but I could not resist the temptation to speak to you."

Prodigal Tom started at sound of his voice, betraying no little surprise and sudden fear. The young officer noticed his perturbation, and to relieve him, continued:

"Sir, I am Clement Fairmont, Captain of Dragoons."

"Captain, I assure you it affords me pleasure to make your acquaintance," replied Tom.

"I have known you for some time by reputation, Tom," the captain said.

"And my rebel brother, Delaware Dick, also, I dare say."

"Yes; I have met your brother, Delaware Dick," he answered, a strange smile playing over his face.

"I presume there are few officers of dragoons, or of partisan rangers who have not met Dick," the young Tory replied; "and some of them have met him to their sorrow. And while I regret that I have a brother engaged against my king, I must admit that he is a thorn in the British crown—one that should be removed at all hazards."

Captain Fairmont gazed steadily into Tom's eyes for full half a minute, then he said:

"Tom, do you know where your family is?"

"I know where they were last," he answered, evasively.

"They have not changed places for some time. I called upon your mother and sister, Geraldine, a few days ago, as I came down from New York."

"Indeed?" exclaimed Prodigal Tom, betraying some nervousness. "I hope you left them well, captain?"

"Quite well, and praying for peace."

"May God protect them until this war is over! Mother was very sorry when the war began, and for the sake of her boys has endeavored to remain neutral; but Geraldine has always been like brother Dick, a confirmed little rebel."

"Yes, she hesitates not in expressing her feeling for the American cause," said Fairmont; "and, Tom, I think a great deal as she does in regard to this war upon the Colonies."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Prodigal Tom, softly, arching his sullen brows as though a new light had burst upon his mind. "I see now, captain, what ails you. Geraldine Melinott has won your affections."

"Well," replied Fairmont, slightly confused, "I always thought this war was unjust; but having purchased a captain's commission in the army, I was unfortunately sent here to America. I say unfortunately, though I don't know that it has been unfortunate to me, for had it been otherwise, I should never have met Geraldine."

"Then you love her, captain?"

"I will frankly admit I do, Prodigal Tom."

"Then don't let her win you from your country and king, captain, or by heavens you will be unworthy of her."

"I know she is worthy of any living man, Tom, and her devotion to the colonies is that of a heroic woman. She speaks in strong praise of her brother Dick and his service to the colonies; but of you, Tom, she, and your mother, have never spoken."

"Ay, they have denounced me as the prodigal son, I hear," said Tom, bitterly. "Strong, indeed, must be my mother and sister's love for their country when it will turn them against me. But they will see that I am right."

Again Captain Fairmont fixed his eyes upon Prodigal Tom's as though determined to penetrate his very thoughts. It was really a relief to Tom when the bray of a trumpet, and the roll of drums calling to arms, resounded through the camp, diverting the attention of Fairmont from the secret that lay buried in his heart.

The alarm had been sounded on discovering the approach of a band of provincial horse, which the picket had reported to be the advance of Washington's army. But the report was unfounded, and the enemy withdrew toward Trenton, without firing a gun, as soon as they came within sight of the British army; Captain Fairmont and Prodigal Tom, at the head of their men, were dispatched in pursuit of them. But all they found was a vagabond Indian—old Doctor Dave—wandering toward Trenton.

CHAPTER X.

A STRANGE MEETING.

SOME twenty miles north of Princeton was a magnificent estate known as Fairmont Place. Its eastern boundary was the Raritan river, along which its broad acres stretched for a league or two. A palatial residence adorned the place, surrounded by a beautiful park that was diversified by drives and graveled walks.

Large barns and out-houses stood adjacent; and long rows of neat little tenement-houses, half-hidden in a border of shrubbery stretching down the lane, added an appearance of thrift to the premises.

Colonel Samuel Fairmont had emigrated to America at an early day. He came as a scion of one of the best families of England, and with the future greatness of the colonies at heart, began the erection of a home in the wilderness bordering on the Raritan. Having the advantage of some wealth, he soon had the foundation of a great fortune laid; and for nearly half a century, it continued to increase gradually.

Colonel Fairmont's residence had not been altogether a private one. He had served in some of the Indian wars, and gained the distinction of a colonel. He afterward served as a colonial officer, and might have attained to distinction, had he not refused promotion in order to devote his entire time to the cultivation and improvement of his estate.

Through all those years of residence in America among American people, he adhered strictly to his English customs and ideas; and when the Revolution began, many wondered upon which side Colonel Fairmont would throw his sympathies, since he was slow in expressing an opinion. In the course of time this became a question of great interest, for it was well known that his wealth would carry great influence whichever way he went.

The old man—being now upward of seventy—was really placed between two fires, and in order to escape both, determined to maintain a strict neutrality. But that he held an unexpressed preference for one side or the other, there was not a doubt; and so, both royal and patriot spies were constantly on

the alert for some word or act that would betray his heart's sentiments. The colonel, however, was wily as a fox, and mistrusting the motives of these spies, finally came to regard every stranger as one prying into his cherished secrets. Notwithstanding this fact, however, the doors of Fairmont Place were always open to the traveler—stranger or acquaintance, royalist or rebel.

A few evenings after the battle of Trenton, Colonel Fairmont and a gentleman were seated in the spacious library of Fairmont Place, enjoying a pleasant conversation. The colonel was unusually hospitable and communicative, for in the stranger he felt that he had a guest whose motive was in no manner secret.

The stranger was a young man, with a keen, gray eye, and a crop of sandy hair and whiskers; and while there was nothing attractive in his general appearance, there was nothing calculated to engender mistrust; for, in those days, few traveled alone but what were suspected of some secret designs in some shape or other.

In the midst of their conversation, however, they were suddenly interrupted by a negro servant, who entered the room and announced a stranger at the door desiring lodging for the night.

The old man's placid countenance changed to a vexed look; but, after a moment's hesitation, he said:

"Show him in, till I see of what metal he is composed."

The traveler was ushered into the library, when the old man, rising from his seat, gave him a sharp, critical look, and then said:

"Good-evening, sir; you travel late. It is after ten, sir."

"I dare say it is," replied the stranger, in a tone that had an agreeable ring to the old man's ear; "but I was determined to reach Fairmont Place before I stopped, for I have long been anxious to rest beneath its roof."

"Then you shall not be disappointed, sir; take a seat, and I will see that your horse is cared for and groomed, and that a bite of supper is prepared for yourself. Whom have I the honor of addressing, sir?"

"Marvin Elwood, of New York."

"Indeed?" exclaimed the old man, taking his hand; "well, Mr. Elwood, I am pleased to meet you. Allow me to introduce you to Mr. Roscommon, who is also a guest of mine to-night."

In cordial terms the two acknowledged the introduction, when all three became seated.

Marvin Elwood could not have been over three-and-twenty years of age. He was a little below medium size, but rather prepossessing in form and features. He possessed a wealth of long dark hair, and a set of flossy whiskers that gave him an additional look of manhood and force of character; while a pair of keen, bright eyes shot their pleasant glances, full of mesmeric power, into the old man's face and around the room in an indifferent and honest sort of a way that at once disarmed Fairmont of all doubts of his new guest.

After passing the compliments of the day, Mr. Elwood was conducted to the dining-room, where an ample repast had been spread for him by a colored female servant.

"A very agreeable gentleman, colonel," Roscommon said, when alone with his host, "but rest assured he is a deep one."

"I shall endeavor to draw him out when he returns," replied Fairmont, "and see how he stands on the question of the day."

Elwood soon returned to the library—Fairmont's favorite sitting-room—much refreshed by his repast, and seating himself, at once entered into conversation. He talked easily, his sentences flowing smooth and unbroken; and to the surprise of his companions, he made no effort to conceal his sympathies for the colonies, but expressed himself in the strongest terms in favor of the revolt of the oppressed people.

This expression of feeling, Colonel Fairmont noticed, touched Roscommon unfavorably. He moved uneasily on his chair, and after his feelings had become worked up to a certain pitch, he replied in a manner derogatory to Elwood's views.

Colonel Fairmont remained calm as a summer sky; but when he saw that an adverse feeling was rising between his guests, he broke the current of conversation by ordering in a bottle of Madeira and glasses.

This the guests did not hesitate to partake of; but instead of producing a salutary effect, it only served to excite their brains, and increase their feeling against the cause which the other espoused.

"You are endeavoring to evade solid facts, Mr. Elwood," Roscommon at length protested; "but suppose we accept your own theory, I can't see what moral power you rebels can be said to possess to make one of you equal to three British soldiers."

"Well, this can be readily accounted for. We are fighting on our own grounds; we select our own battle-fields; our own way of fighting; and usually our own time. We never risk a battle till we think we can win; so you can see the advantages we possess. As to one provincial being equal to three enemies, that has been fully demonstrated upon more than one occasion among the partisans."

"Name a single instance, will you Mr. Elwood?" Roscommon said, betraying some inward emotion.

"The battle between British Bill's and Delaware Dick's forces yesterday. The latter with fifteen men whipped the former with forty or more," replied Marvin Elwood.

"Delaware Dick did nothing of the kind," retorted Roscommon in a tone that implied more than the disputes of a friendly argument.

"I tell you he did," reiterated Elwood in a tone that was firm and unyielding; "he absolutely

whipped him and drove him out of the neighborhood."

"Sir, you would have me believe that British Bill is an infernal coward, would you?" cried Roscommon, his eyes flashing fiercely.

"Come, gentlemen," cried Colonel Fairmont, "I thought this was to be a friendly matter. Don't get off of balance, gentlemen, but take it cool."

"It was to have been a friendly discussion," said Roscommon, "and with that courtesy due one gentleman from another; but this has not been observed by Mr. Elwood and I shall insist on satisfaction by way of an answer to my question from him."

"You shall have it, sir," coolly returned Elwood: "as to British Bill being a coward at heart, I am unable to say, positively; but he acted very much like a coward in his fight with Delaware Dick."

"Sir, this is an insult that you shall answer for!" thundered Roscommon, tearing a wig from his head and a mass of false whiskers from his face, "for I, *Rebel Roscommon, am British Bill!*" and as he concluded he drew a pistol and cocked it.

"Sir," replied Marvin Elwood with marvelous coolness, "you shall have satisfaction to your heart's content, for I, Marvin Elwood, am Delaware Dick!" and he, too, threw aside a disguise of hair and whiskers, at the same time drawing a pistol and cocking it.

"My God, gentlemen!" exclaimed Samuel Fairmont, starting up, as his two guests threw aside their disguise, and drew their weapons, "I want no murder in my house!"

"But, colonel," said the rebel spy, with provoking coolness, fixing a steady, determined look upon his hated foe, "your amiable friend, British Bill, is urgent in his desire for satisfaction."

"Put away your pistols, men," cried the old man, involuntarily pushing aside the young Tory leader's weapon with one hand and Delaware Dick's with the other; "there must be no bloodshed here. If you will fight, go out and fight as brave enemies fight, upon the field."

"Colonel Fairmont!" stormed the Tory partisan, his face flushed with liquor, his eyes flashing with fury, and his hand trembling with excitement; "no rebel, especially that outlawed traitor, shall insult me with impunity. His life is the reprisal I demand."

"You speak as though you were a host," retorted Delaware Dick, with a contemptuous calmness.

Colonel Fairmont watched like a hawk that neither raised his weapon against the other, for he most earnestly desired to avert the horror of a conflict.

A table was between the young partisan foes. Upon it sat the glasses and bottle from which they had drunk to each other's health.

"I will yet make you feel that my power is that of a host, Delaware Dick," was British Bill's response. "You have bearded the lion in his den, sir, and since it is Colonel Fairmont's request that no scene be enacted here, I shall respect his wish, and—"

"I am surprised that you have the least respect for any one," interrupted his antagonist.

"You will be still more surprised before you get through with me, now mind."

Dick made no reply more than to recognize his words by a sneer that was more provoking than the bitterest retort would have been.

British Bill had risen to his feet, but Dick remained seated, with his thoughts divided between the young Tory and Colonel Fairmont. Somewhere or other, he had seen the old man, but to save him he could not recall the time nor place. His face lingered in his memory like the face of one seen in a vague dream that leaves its influence upon us, but keeps the main characters just beyond our mental reach.

While revolving the matter in his mind, his restless eyes suddenly caught a movement upon the wall behind the colonel and to the right of British Bill. A curtain of crimson satin was pushed slowly and noiselessly aside, revealing a large, square picture-frame of rosewood and mahogany that had been set into the wall and elaborately finished off. From this frame the face of George the Third looked down upon him with all the tyrannical imbecility of that English potentate.

The sight of the picture settled one point in Delaware Dick's mind: Colonel Samuel Fairmont was a loyal subject of the crown. But, why had he kept it covered? Was he afraid that the exposition of the picture would betray his sympathies?

While these questions were being entertained in our hero's mind, he saw the portrait of King George disappear from the frame as if by magic; and in the darkness behind the spot where it had been, a white, ghostly object appeared. At first there was no tangible form to it, but as it approached the frame, it was gradually unfolded from the nimbus of darkness surrounding it, and the fair and lovely face of a young girl stood out in bold relief before him.

Delaware Dick started with an involuntary cry of surprise, for in the face of the young girl, he recognized the features of his betrothed, Agnes Melrose!

All was plain enough to him now. Colonel Fairmont was the fussy old gentleman that had stopped in front of the Half-way Inn with Agnes, when he was a prisoner in the building. Fairmont Place, then, was the home of Agnes. His heart gave a great bound of joy, for it had been relieved of a heavy weight.

British Bill saw the young patriot's sudden emotions, but imparted a wrong construction to their origin. He believed they were the expressions of fear on the part of Dick; and a smile of haughty triumph mounted his face. He fumbled in his pockets for something, and finally brought to light a small silver whistle. This he twirled between his thumb and index-finger for quite a minute, at the same time bestowing a terrible look upon his young enemy, as though he intended to annihilate him.

Dick, however, soon regained his equanimity, and returned his adversary's look with searching contempt. This so enraged the young Tory that he turned abruptly upon his heel, and advancing to the east door of the library, threw it open. Then he placed the whistle to his lips and blew a sharp blast upon it, that pierced keenly through the frosty night.

Delaware Dick at once mistrusted the import of his enemy's movements, and yet he betrayed only the coolest indifference. With a strange smile upon his face he rose to his feet, and crossing the floor, threw open the west door.

The tramp of feet was heard near each door outside.

Colonel Fairmont started with a look of profound horror upon every lineament of his wrinkled face, while amazement became stamped upon the features of British Bill's.

"My amiable Tory friend," Delaware Dick said, while a grim smile of triumph played about his lips, "the signal you gave was exactly the same that I was to have given my men, in case necessity required it. Sir, you have called up the Scarlet Wings, as well as your Tory nighthawks."

Even as he spoke, a Scarlet Wing, with a drawn saber, entered through the west door of the library; and, at the same instant, a Tory came in at the east door.

Then followed a scene of terror that sent Colonel Fairmont flying from the library. Scarlet Wing after Scarlet Wing, and Tory after Tory came filing into the room, and "quickly forming in the ranks of war."

CHAPTER XI.

A DOUBLE CATASTROPHE.

A CONFLICT in the library of Samuel Fairmont seemed inevitable. Delaware Dick and British Bill stood glaring at each other across the room with a fierce and deadly determination in their looks. Dick still maintained his usual composure, but his enemy fairly trembled with the intensity of his emotions.

The followers of these two young partisans were greatly surprised at the situation of affairs, for they had not the remotest idea of what was going on until they entered the library. Each party had come in response to the preconcerted signal of its leader. It required but a few moments, however, for them to define the state of affairs and place themselves in a defensive position.

Both parties seemed to be actuated by the same power. They hastily formed in lines up and down the great room. Guns and pistols were held in a position for instant use. Murmurs of deadly vengeance and bitter animosity passed from lip to lip. A full score of Tory partisans glared across the room into the faces of as many Patriots.

At this juncture a footstep was heard approaching along the hall leading from the main building into the library, and the next moment Samuel Fairmont entered the room entirely recovered from his late panic. With remarkable coolness and provoking effrontery, he advanced to the table in the center of the room, and filling one of the goblets, held it aloft and exclaimed:

"Here is success to you, my friends, adherents to the royal cause of King George," and then he swallowed the liquor at a single gulp.

A shout from the lips of the Tories answered his words of cheer, for they gave the Tories renewed courage. On the other hand they smote heavily upon the ears of the patriots, and filled the heart of Delaware Dick with a feeling akin to despondency. He was convinced now, beyond a single doubt, that Fairmont was a royalist; and he felt that an insurmountable barrier was rising between him and his betrothed, Agnes Melrose. But he had little time for reflection upon the matter. Scarcely had the old man drank to the success of the Tories than the latter raised their weapons and fired upon the patriots.

Our friends, however, were on the alert, and anticipating this sudden movement of the foe, averted the volley of lead by dropping upon their knees. Not a patriot was touched, and the next instant their weapons rung forth in deadly clash, and the battle became general.

The Fairmont mansion now resounded with all the horrors of the battle-field; and the terrible din rolled and echoed from chamber to chamber, filling the inmates with speechless terror. The house shook under the clashing strokes of sabers, blows of clubbed muskets, and fall of bodies; while the night without was convulsed with the horrible sounds, which, as they issued from the mansion, became incorporated into one dreadful roar. It rolled away over field and woods.

The library soon became filled with thick sulphureous smoke, through which the lights of the chandelier shone dim and ghostly, and through which the forms of the combatants surged and swayed like phantoms in the gloaming.

It seemed strange, to the terrified auditors crouching in the adjacent parlor, that so many shots could be fired and so many blows struck without some decisive result.

Suddenly the butt of a long rifle sweeping overhead in the hands of an infuriated Tory, struck the pendent lights above and brought chandelier and all to the floor. For a moment darkness pervaded the room, and a lull in the conflict followed. But the gloom and silence lasted only for a moment. One of the burning candles flew across the room and falling in a pile of papers, set them on fire. There was no one to extinguish the flames, and in a moment a broad glare lit up the room and shone upon the scene of horror. The floor was slippery with blood, in which a score of patriots and Tories together lay dead or dying.

The conflict was renewed with increased fury.

The flames rose higher and higher, communicating with the heavy curtains, and licking and lapping their fiery tongues along the ceiling and walls until a holocaust seemed to threaten the lives of both patriot and Tory.

The room became filled to suffocation with heat and smoke. It was more than human nature could endure, and finally terminated the conflict and drove the combatants from the room. They carried their wounded with them; but the dead were left to the devouring flames.

Out in the open air the patriot rangers expected the struggle to be renewed; but the Tories disappeared in the darkness, and were seen no more that night.

Our friends, with their wounded in charge, hastily retreated from the place. They moved down the road until they reached the timber, then turning abruptly to the right, pushed on through the woods until they reached the point where they had left their horses. Here they halted to enumerate their loss and ascertain the extent of the injuries of the wounded.

They found that half of their number were missing and wounded. Among the missing was their fearless young leader, Delaware Dick. A comrade had seen him fall in the heat of the conflict, under the blow of a Tory musket; nor did he see him rise again.

A gloom of despondency and bitter sorrow settled upon the faces and in the hearts of the survivors of the little band of partisans. They knew that their beloved young leader was among the slain left in the burning house, and it was too late now to think of recovering the body from the flames. Already they could see the flames bursting from the mansion and shooting their long beams into the sky. The surrounding soon became lit up with a dazzling glare, and from their covert in the forest, the patriot rangers could see the Fairmont mansion enveloped in a mountain of seething fire, and could distinguish forms passing hurriedly to and fro about the grounds.

The leadership of Delaware Dick's band, or what was left of it, now devolved upon Lieutenant Banks, a young patriot, whose knowledge of the country, indomitable courage and fearless daring fully qualified him to lead the party.

Though the little band of partisans had suffered the loss of their beloved captain and nearly one half of their number, they did not lose all hope in the cause for which they were battling. On the contrary, it roused the spirit within them, and henceforth they resolved to devote their time and lives to the execution of one object—the avenging of the blood of their fallen comrades.

The care of the wounded was the first duty devolving upon them, and Lieutenant Banks had concluded to move them at once to the hut of an old woodman and true patriot, who lived a few miles north; but before they could effect arrangements necessary for the removal of the suffering men, the fierce bark of a dog startled the little band.

One of the rangers seized his gun and peered into the gloom around him.

Again the bark of the dog smote upon their ears. The horses sniffed the air and pawed the ground uneasily.

"Boys," whispered Banks, "there's something not just right about here!"

"Ho dar, massa, don't shoot, for I'se a friend to everybody," came a voice from out the gloom.

"Who are you?" demanded Banks, seizing his pistol.

"I'se ole Grindy, I is; and dat dog's Box; de best dog for 'coon and 'possum on de ribber," and as the speaker thus explained, he advanced into the opening where our friends were awaiting him.

"Well, sir, what are you doing here?" asked Banks.

"I'se huntin' you; dat is, if you's dem pattyrots what Delaware Dick leads."

"Well, what do you want of us? Who sent you here?"

"One ob your friends—didn't ax his name; but he war wounded in de fight, and crawled out into de bushes, whare ole Grindy find him."

"Bless Heaven!" cried a youth, excitedly, "perhaps it is Dick himself."

"He didn't tell me what his name war; but ole Grindy tote him off into de woods and hide him whar de ornery Tories won't find him."

"How does it come that you are a rebel, and yet the servant of old Fairmont?"

"Wal, massa," said the old negro, scratching his woolly pate, "ole massa Fairmont alway tell his nigger dat he's pattyrot when pattyrots am around, and as dey come de mostest times, ole Grindy got to be a pattyrot at heart, like de young missus. And now, if you'll jis' take dem wounded folk down to whar I'se got dat other feller hid, I'll jis' bet a doubloon dey don't suffer, and dat de Tories won't find dem. Dis chile's no slouch ob a doctor, and as I'se too ole and shaky to fight in de ranks, I want to do sumfin in de cause of liberty."

There was something so honest, outspoken, and noble in the old man's words that the rangers at once became convinced of his sincerity of heart. To make sure, however, that the old man was not trying to deceive them, two of the party were dispatched with him to where he claimed he had secured one of their comrades; and that he might not become offended at their evident mistrust, the rangers claimed a desire to investigate the condition of the quarters he had selected before consigning the wounded therein.

With his dog in the lead, the old man directed the way toward his hidden hospital. For several minutes they pushed through the gloomy labyrinths of

the woods, along the sinuous windings of a dim path, and through mazes of tangled undergrowth, finally arriving at their destination in a place where the gloom, silence, and desolation impressed the rangers with a vague consciousness of being in the realms of grim solitude.

In a few minutes, however, they were on their way back to the command; and, on arriving there, gave the most satisfactory evidence of Old Grindy's loyalty. But the command they had found in the old negro's hidden retreat was not Delaware Dick, and the announcement of the fact crushed the ardent hope that the little band had dared to entertain of its being their leader.

The rest of the wounded were at once removed to Grindy's quarters, and left in the old man's charge; while Lieutenant Banks and his followers took to their saddles and rode away in the direction of Fairmont Place.

The location of the mansion was now indicated by a mighty pyramid of fire, which thrust its quivering apex almost into the very dome of heaven, and spread its broad glare for miles over field and forest.

When about a mile from the mansion the rangers drew rein, and dismounting, concealed their horses in the edge of the woods, and then crept along in the shadow of a stone fence toward the fire. As they drew near, they saw a body of mounted Tories and the king's horse come down the road and stop in front of the burning house. This induced the patriots to be more cautious, and leaving the main command behind, Lieutenant Banks and two comrades crept on until they could command a fair view of the crowd gathered about the glaring ruins.

"By heavens!" were the first words that burst from Banks's lips, "do you see that young officer standing near that grotto, north of the ruins?"

"Yes," answered Perry Hammond; "he seems to be taking it cool as a cucumber."

"Ay; but don't you recognize him, Perry?" asked Banks.

They were not over a hundred yards from the officer in question; and for fully a minute Hammond studied his form and features closely.

"I'll admit," he finally said, "that there is something familiar about his form, but then I can't recall—"

"Why, Perry," interrupted Banks, "it is Prodigal Tom, the Tory, and brother of our own Delaware Dick."

"Ah, indeed! Then it is the resemblance in form and movement between the brothers that struck me as being familiar. I wonder if the young Tory knows that the body of his brother is being consumed in that awful fire?"

"Perhaps he does, which accounts for his grave demeanor and silent attitude."

Here and there, about the park, little groups of officers and soldiers, men and women, both black and white, were gathered together, gazing upon the ruins with faces that seemed ghastly in the light of the red flames. The black servants and white tenants of Fairmont Place had all flocked to the scene of destruction. There was a horrible fascination in the awful flame that they could not resist, and before the roof of the mansion fell in, over a hundred persons were present.

Banks and his companions studied each group and each face closely; and presently their eyes fell upon the form of a young girl who sat alone in the park upon a rustic seat. Her face looked ghastly in the lurid light, and her eyes were red and swollen with weeping.

This maiden was Agnes Melross, the betrothed wife of Delaware Dick; and while Banks had his eyes still upon her, he saw a negro youth emerge from the shadows behind her and touch her upon the shoulder. He saw the maiden start to her feet and grasp the lad by the hand as if eager for some intelligence from his lips; but when the lad shook his woolly head and pointed toward the burning mansion, she clasped her hands to her brow, and sunk upon the earth.

The negro lad lifted her tenderly from the cold ground and placed her upon the seat, then drawing her shawl closer about her head and shoulders, he turned and walked sadly away.

While this scene was being enacted, Banks saw that Prodigal Tom was watching the maiden narrowly; and as soon as the black went away, the young Tory turned and approached her.

He stopped in front of her, lifted his hat and spoke. The maiden started at sound of his voice; but at sight of his face, she sunk back into her seat, more than ever overcome by her emotions of sorrow.

CHAPTER XII.

CORNWALLIS RECEIVES A VISITOR.

SHORTLY after the astounding news of the capture of the Hessians at Trenton had reached the ear of Lord Cornwallis, who was encamped near Princeton, he called his generals together in his private consultation room, and to them made known his intention of marching against Washington at once. He had learned through his scouts that the American general had taken a position in the rear of Trenton, and was intrenching himself there, evidently, with the intention of holding the place.

"But, general," said one of his officers, "the sagacious Washington would never have dared to confront your army had he not been assured of his own power and ability to cope with you. I dare say he has received reinforcements."

"Ay, my lord," added another, "reinforcements in spirit if not in numbers. The defeat of Colonel Rahl will encourage the Americans to fight like Spartans."

"But, general," said Cornwallis, "I propose to

ascertain both his strength and position before I make a strike."

This settled all feelings that were of an adverse nature to the general's plans; and the council soon adjourned.

Scarcely had the last officer retired from the commander's tent, when his prince of spies, Prodigal Tom, was announced; and the next moment the British general and the young Tory were closeted together.

From the lips of Prodigal Tom, Cornwallis learned, for the first time, the news of Delaware Dick's death at Fairmont Place, and, although it were glad tidings to his ears, he, out of respect for Tom's feelings for his dead kinsman, manifested no outward emotions of joy. On the contrary, he expressed deep regret that one so promising as Delaware Dick should throw himself away in such an unholy cause, and be cut down in the prime and vigor of youth.

"But," said the general, finally changing the subject, "I am glad you have come, Tom."

"Why so, my lord?" questioned the young Tory.

"I want to hear from Washington's army."

"Colonel Rahl heard from it once too oft, my lord," responded Tom, facetiously, a smile playing over his face.

"I am not desirous of such news as that, Tom," the commander replied; "it is of Washington's strength and position of his forces and batteries that I desire to know. If I can learn where his strong points are, that will enable me to attack his weak points."

"Then you propose to attack Washington, my lord—but pardon my inquisitiveness. I have been in Washington's camp more than once, and I shall risk another venture there for the information you desire. Between this and morning, my lord, you may expect to hear from Trenton."

Cornwallis had perfect confidence in Prodigal Tom's superior ability as a spy, and after some instructions regarding the information desired, he dispatched the youth upon his dangerous mission.

Scarcely had the young spy quitted the presence of the British general, before an old man, desiring to see the commander, appeared at head-quarters. As he was well-known to several of the soldiers, he had no trouble in gaining admission to the general's presence.

"Sir," said the latter, "I am informed that your name is Wesley Marble, that you are a royalist, that you have sons in the king's army; now, what brings you here?"

"The news, my lord, of Delaware Dick's death in a fight up on the Raritan."

"That is stale news; I have heard of his death before now, Mr. Marble."

"Ah, indeed!" exclaimed the old Tory, thoughtfully; "well, general, it seems queer, doesn't it, that brothers would array themselves against each other as Prodigal Tom and Delaware Dick have done?"

"That is nothing uncommon; brothers are fighting brothers and sons fighting fathers in every battle. But I have never heard of Delaware Dick and Prodigal Tom meeting in conflict."

"Nor I, general; and right here let me say this: I have known the Melinott family for years, and in all these years I never knewed that were two boys in that family. The only one I knowed anything about was Thomas R. Melinott, and if that'd been two, I'd 'a' known it, for the Melinotts war our highest neighbors."

Cornwallis looked searchingly into Wesley Marble's face, and, after some soul-reading, he replied:

"Have you seen Thomas R. Melinott since the war begun?"

"Yes; once or twice," responded the old man.

"Which of the two, Delaware Dick and Prodigal Tom, then, is Thomas R.?"

"Delaware Dick is the one I always knowed from a wee bit of a boy."

"Then you have not seen Prodigal Tom, lately?"

"Yes, sir; I've seen him, too."

"What's your opinion of him?"

Wesley Marble glanced quickly around the room as if to assure himself that no one was near him besides Cornwallis; then leaning across the table, he whispered something in the general's ear that caused the latter to start as though the words had been the sting of a serpent.

"Wesley Marble!" he thundered, "what assurance have you for this?"

"Just what I told you, my lord."

Cornwallis seemed amazed, and for a moment he remained silent and thoughtful; while the nervous twitching of his facial muscles betrayed his inward emotions. At length he asked:

"Where is the Melinott family, Marble?"

"You've got me now, general; after the old man was killed by British Bill's Tory ranger, about a year ago, the mother and the daughter, Geraldine, disappeared from their old home in the Delaware valley, and the good Lord only knows where they have gone. But, I've been thinkin' the matter over and over, and now I've come to the conclusion that the disappearance of the mother and daughter was made in order to conceal all positive proof of what I've been telling you."

A look of great uneasiness clouded the British officer's face. It was plainly evident that he gave strong credence to the suspicions of Wesley Marble.

"Mr. Marble," he said, "I am going to impose a duty upon you: I want you to find, if possible, where the widow Melinott and her daughter Geraldine are concealing themselves, and report to me at your earliest convenience. This matter must be sounded to its depths."

"I'll do my best, general," the old Tory replied, and after some desultory conversation he went away, leaving Cornwallis in a fever of excitement.

The general kept Marble's secret to himself, for more than one reason; but, despite his efforts to appear indifferent, those around him noticed that the old man's visit had left him in a state of uneasiness.

Darkness finally settled over the camp. The general retired early; but he could not sleep. He lay awake through the entire night, eagerly waiting the return of Prodigal Tom. Morning came, but the spy did not. Great fears for the young royalist's safety were entertained.

Concealing the emotions, that had troubled him so long, in the hurry and bustle of breaking camp, Cornwallis appeared calm and collected, as was his wont on the eve of some great event; but not until he was moving with his army toward Trenton did he experience any relief at heart.

He had decided not to postpone his advance upon Washington in consequence of Prodigal Tom's non-appearance; for, while the information sought by the spy would be of great advantage to him, it was too immaterial, in another sense, to cause delay. Still, he entertained a hope that Tom would meet him before he reached Trenton; but in this he was disappointed.

On arriving in the vicinity of Trenton, he found Washington occupying a strong position, with a small river—a tributary to the Delaware—in his front. But Cornwallis felt so confident of his superior strength, that he at once began an attack on the American lines, and attempted to cross the stream in face of a deadly fire. But in this he failed. The galling fire of the American rifles forced him back, with a heavy loss. Again and again the attempt to cross the stream and carry the provincial works by storm was renewed; but each time the British were repulsed.

Night at length put an end to the battle, when Cornwallis was enabled to ascertain the extent of his loss, which had been heavy. Success was despair of by his army, until a heavy reinforcement arrived from New Brunswick, and inspired the defeated soldiers with renewed courage, and strengthened their spirits for the morrow's work.

Under cover of darkness, the British planted several batteries in commanding positions, threw up a long line of breastworks and perfected other arrangements, which, all together, would give them a decided advantage over the position of the previous day.

"I'll catch the fox to-morrow," said Cornwallis, alluding to Washington.

All through the night the American sentinels could be seen pacing to and fro within the light of the camp-fires that burned brightly on the plains beyond Assumption creek.

At length dawn ushered in the day, and when about to order an advance upon the enemies' lines, Cornwallis discovered the American camp was deserted—that Washington had given them the slip, while keeping up the semblance of an occupied camp through the night.

Where the American army had gone, the British knew not; nor had they the remotest idea of the time it had broken camp, for the camp-fires burned brightly through the entire night.

Cornwallis finally concluded that Washington must have fled back into Pennsylvania, and while discussing the expediency of following him, a strange sound burst upon the ears of the whole royal army.

"It is thunder," said the British commander.

"Nay, general," exclaimed one of his aids; "it does not thunder here in January. It is the roar of cannon, my lord. The Americans have eluded us and marched upon Princeton! To arms! To arms! We have been out-generaled. It is the sound of Washington's guns!"

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW MATTERS STOOD AT FAIRMONT PLACE.

SEVERAL days had passed since the conflict at Fairmont Place. The death of Delaware Dick had reached the ears of most of the settlers along the Raritan and Delaware valleys; and while the news brought a sense of relief to the Tory element, it cast a gloom of sadness and regret over every patriot heart.

The little band of Scarlet Wings, however, had not been destroyed, and under the leadership of Harry Banks, it kept up a mortal terror among the Tories. The loss of their leader did not deprive the country of the usefulness of the rangers.

Samuel Fairmont attributed the loss of his residence to the rebel rangers, the Scarlet Wings; and at once declared his intention of sacrificing all he possessed, if need be, in behalf of the royal cause in America. He did not leave his farm, but at once moved into the old, double log-house that stood near the ruins of his mansion, and in which he had lived many years before the erection of his new residence. It was large and commodious, and as most of the contents of the mansion had been saved from the fire, it was soon furnished; and the colonel and his family found themselves settled once more—comfortably, if not elegantly.

Since the night of the conflict, Colonel Fairmont noticed that his grand-daughter, Agnes Melross, had undergone a material change in spirit, which he could not attribute alone to the loss of their residence. She was restless and uneasy. A vague anxiety seemed to pervade her very soul; while a cloud of sadness settled upon her brow and eclipsed the angelic light of her sweet, vivacious young heart.

"My child," the old man said one day, when he found her seated alone, apparently in great dejection of spirit, "why is it that you are so sad and downhearted of late?"

"Are these not times to try men's souls, grandfather?" she replied.

"Yes; but what have you, a girl—a child, to fear?"

"As much as any girl, who has an old grandfather liable to be killed at any time by the provincials."

"Provincials!" drawled the old man with all the bitter contempt he could throw into the word, and his looks; "Agnes, for mercy sake, don't speak of those rebels in such mild terms, or I shall think your long visit at Melross farm has turned you into a little rebel. I know your uncle is a rebel at heart, as is nearly every Scotch-Irishman in America. I hope, my child, you are not pining for associations you left behind on Stony Brook—associations that would be a dishonor to the name of the Fairmonts, of which my child, who was your mother, was a noble offspring. The escutcheon of our house was pointed out as one of the proudest and most honored of England's families; and I pray, my child, that you, who are the last direct descendant of my family, will endeavor to perpetuate our name. Your cousin Clement Fairmont, to whom you were betrothed in your childhood, according to the customs of old England's first families, will certainly visit us soon. I have not seen Clement, myself, since he was a boy of four; that was when I went back to England on a visit some sixteen years ago. But they say he is a royal youngster, handsome and gallant as a young knight. I know you will be pleased with him, Agnes; and, that he will make you a kind and loving husband. You are now seventeen and I am seventy. My days are about numbered; the sands of life run, and yet before I go, I want to see you settled in life. You are old enough now to think for yourself, Agnes, and see the great propriety of what I most anxiously desire for your good, and that of our family name."

Agnes appeared to listen intently to her grandfather's words; but they nowise met with her happy approval. She had never seen the cousin to whom she had been betrothed in her babyhood, and inwardly hoped that she never should. The image of her boy lover, Delaware Dick, was constantly before her; and down in the silent depths of her heart of hearts there slumbered a feeble ray of holy light which, in itself, was a beacon of hope reaching beyond the selfish motives of her kinsman.

"Grandpapa," she finally said, "suppose I do not like Clement Fairmont?"

"There is no danger but you will, if you fix your whole mind and heart upon the consummation of the one object."

"I don't like the manners of those young Englishmen, grandpapa."

"Ah! you have become thoroughly Americanized, my child," replied the old man a little bitterly; "I presume you can see traits to admire in a young buckskin, where all is gross vulgarity in a gallant young Englishman. For illustration, you take Captain William Walton, otherwise known as British Bill, and Delaware Dick, and note the difference there was in them. The one is possessed of all the courtesy and refinement of an English gentleman; while the young rebel, peace be to his ashes, was coarse and illiterate."

"British Bill's outward appearance is that of a gallant young officer; but if Clement Fairmont's character is no better than his, there will be no attraction for me about him. It is not the form and blandishments that make the man in my eyes, but the soul, the image of God."

"What have you against Captain Bill's character, Agnes? Is it a crime to fight for one's king and country, as he is doing? Were he that young rebel Delaware Dick, whose dust mingles with the ashes of our burnt home, then you might talk about character."

Agnes bit her quivering lips to keep down the rebellious emotions struggling for utterance. Her face became flushed, and her eyes burned with an unusual luster. Her grandfather noticed her excitement, and continued:

"I see, my child, that you are about three-fourths rebel. I am sorry now that I ever permitted you to go over to your uncle's on the Stony. I know they are all rebels over there; and so you've become inoculated with that atmosphere."

Before Agnes could reply, the clatter of hoofs near the door arrested their attention, and the next moment a horseman drew rein and dismounted in front of the house. A glance told them who it was—British Bill.

The young, royal captain was received into the humble home of the Fairmonts, by a hearty welcome from the colonel, and a lady-like indifference by Agnes. At heart, the latter felt a loathing terror for the enemy who had struck at the life of him she loved; but being possessed of the power of self-control, she managed to disguise her feelings.

British Bill was a specimen of perfect manhood physically; but morally he had been found wanting in that honor and principle which characterizes a brave and true soldier. He was insolent and abusive to the conquered, cruel and merciless to his prisoners.

"My dear friends," he said with affected grace, as he seated himself, "I am pleased—delighted to know that you still have a comfortable home."

"Thank you, captain," replied the old man, "but then it is somewhat of a damper on Fairmont pride to be brought down to a level with the servants and tenants."

"If we fare no worse, grandfather, we will have escaped better than some," Agnes remarked.

"You need have no fears of the Scarlet Wings, my friends," responded the young partisan; "for they will not venture hereaways soon again. If they should, I will be ready for them."

"Certainly, certainly," affirmed the colonel; "I presume you are still encamped at the Cross Hollows."

"Yes; and this morning was joined by the redoubtable Prodigal Tom, and ten men, which makes my force now quite respectable."

"Prodigal Tom!" exclaimed the colonel, "they tell me he's a rollicking young daredevil from the word go. You must bring him down, captain; I merely spoke to him the night of the fire, and I presume he thinks I was rather indifferent, but—"

"He could have expected nothing else under the circumstances, colonel," interrupted the officer with a rude indifference; "Prodigal Tom is a very sensible and considerate young soldier. I have but one fault to find with him."

"What is that, captain?"

"He resembles his brother, Delaware Dick, too much to make one altogether comfortable."

"Do you think so?" replied the colonel; "well, now, I thought differently the other night when he stood revealed to me in the light of my burning home. But then one's features in such lights don't look natural, I admit."

At mention of her lover's name, Agnes's face colored in spite of herself; and to conceal her emotions, which could have been nothing else than those of grief and sorrow, she arose, and walking to the window, gazed out over the field and interminable stretch of woods beyond, her eyes swimming in a mist of tears.

"Well," British Bill said, "I will bring him down here some day, and you can have a fair look at the prodigal son. We may remain at Cross Hollows several days."

"Good! Good!" exclaimed the old royalist, gushing over with enthusiasm; "if you do remain, I want you to make Fairmont Place a kind of a rendezvous, if our limited hospitality will in any respect repay you for so doing. We are indebted to you, captain, for what little we have left of our home."

"Thank you, Mr. Fairmont; I shall endeavor to accept of your proffered hospitality with pleasure."

Fairmont arose, and advancing toward the door, said:

"Excuse my presence a moment, captain; I had almost forgotten to order your horse stabled and groomed."

Before British Bill could enter a protest, in case he desired to do so, the old colonel glided out of the room, leaving Agnes to entertain their guest.

This the maiden did reluctantly, although she artfully concealed her aversion to the young Tory in an amiable conversation. Agnes had met Captain Walton frequently, and, in the meantime, noticed that his visits to Fairmont were being attended with unusual interest. And what surprised her most was, the encouragement her grand-parent gave him, and the adroit and skillful manner in which he always managed to bring them—Agnes and the captain—together. She would have thought nothing particular of this, had the old man not been so firmly set upon her marrying a man she had never seen—her cousin, Clement Fairmont.

The young folks discussed the general topics of the day in a very matter-of-fact way, and it was a great relief to Agnes when the colonel returned.

By this time it was sunset, and the twang of a horn caused British Bill to start uneasily. Rising, he advanced to the door and looked out. He saw a couple of dogs running down toward the negro servants' cabin, where a number of blacks were gathered in a little knot, one with a tin horn in his hand.

"It's nothing, captain," said Fairmont, noticing the officer's uneasiness; "it's only them confounded niggers calling in their forces for a coon-hunt. I've got to put a stop to that night-rambling through the woods, or some niggers 'll come up missing."

British Bill returned to his seat, while Agnes, politely excusing herself, left the parlor, and passed into the kitchen, where Miss Kathleen O'Doon was busily engaged in the preparation of supper.

"Faith, Agnis, me darlint, and mees thought sure yees war niver coming," the Celtic maid exclaimed.

"We have company, and it was impossible for me to get away any sooner. British Bill is in the parlor," replied Agnes, in a low, guarded tone.

"Bad 'cess to the loping bla'gard!" exclaimed Kathleen, indignantly, for her sympathies were with her lover, who was a soldier under Washington.

"Be very careful, Kathie," whispered her young mistress, "and don't let grandpapa find out that we are real patriots, or it will be all our lives are worth."

"Och, choild! and it's not the tongue of Kathleen O'Doon that will betray us."

"Have you the basket filled?" asked Agnes, as she suddenly caught sight of a black face peeping through a clump of lilac-bushes back of the house.

"This long while, me darlint. There it is with cold chicken, nice bread, cold meats, a bottle of poteen, and lots ave noice dainties."

Agnes picked up the basket and passing out at the back-door, approached the bushes where she had seen the black face. A negro lad was there to meet her; and to him she gave the basket with some hastily delivered instructions.

Then turning, she re-entered the house; while the black boy crept around the park unperceived, and joined his friends in front of the cabin. The next minute the black coon-hunters were off for the scene of their nocturnal sports.

Captain Walton took tea with the Fairmonts that evening; and about dusk mounted his horse and started on his return to Cross Hollow. As he rode along his mind was busied with other thoughts than those of the war; his heart filled with other feelings than those of sympathy for the crown. They were thoughts and feelings that were burning their way into his very soul. He tried to dismiss them—throw them aside as he would some foolish vagaries; but he found that his heart failed to respond to the vo-

lition of the will—that it clung to its strangely conceived emotions with unyielding firmness and devotion.

A face, the fair and lovely face of Agnes Melross, rising up before his mental vision, told British Bill that he was in love with the young mistress of Fairmont. It was his first love, yet it was a deep, burning and passionate love—a love that would bear no trifling—brook no rival.

CHAPTER XVII.

CAPTURE OF PRODIGAL TOM.

THE Scarlet Wings under Harry Banks disappeared from the vicinity of Fairmont Place a day or two after the loss of their leader, Delaware Dick. Being aware of the presence of British Bill and Prodigal Tom in the neighborhood, they felt that it would be folly to contend with the consolidated forces of the two Tory leaders; so they turned their course southward and were making their way toward Princeton when they were met by Major Dalrymple with a small party of dragoons that Washington had dispatched in pursuit of British Bill.

It required no extra inducement to persuade the Scarlet Wings to turn back, and, after a short conference, Harry Banks led the way in the direction of Fairmont Place. On the following day they encamped in the great forest bordering on the old colonel's fine estate; and before another night had set in, Dalrymple had arranged a reconnaissance in the direction of British Bill's camp.

The Scarlet Wings heartily accepted his proposed plans, and as soon as darkness had fully set in, Lieutenant Harry Banks and five of his band were ready to accompany the major and his party of ten selected men. They made their way on foot in the direction of Fairmont Place; and after an hour's rapid marching they came to the end of the broad avenue or lane leading by the house.

As the moon was shining brightly, flooding field and forest with its mellow radiance, the major ordered a halt within the border of shadows in order to ascertain whether or not the way beyond was clear, before venturing out from cover of the woods. He and young Banks crept forward to a point where they could command a fair view of the open district, and with keen eyes searched the fields and road before them. They saw nothing whatever, but they imagined they could hear the faint stroke of hooved-feet somewhere in the distance. The sound was so indistinct that they were inclined to doubt their own hearing at first; but by waiting they soon found it was no delusion. It grew plainer and plainer until there was no doubt of the point from whence it emanated; and presently the outlines of a horseman were gradually unfolded from the depths of the distance.

He was coming down the lane from the direction of Fairmont Place, and the two patriots saw the flash of military trappings about him, and heard the jingle of a saber.

"It's a British officer," whispered Dalrymple, drawing his pistol.

"Ay, major!" responded Lieutenant Banks, "if I mistake not, it is the notorious Prodigal Tom."

"Smoke of sacrifice!" exclaimed the major, "then we must capture him at all hazards!"

"Yes; but there he has stopped. Can he have seen us?"

"Impossible; but step back a little further into the shadows."

The horseman had stopped, sure enough, about fifty yards from them, and close by the side of an old tree that stood near the road. But the patriots watched every movement he made. They saw him lean over in the stirrups and put his hand into a hole in the side of the tree. When he withdrew it, they saw that it contained a paper, and knew at once that the tree was a secret post-office, where the young Tory received and delivered letters.

Prodigal Tom, for the horseman was Tom, opened the note, intending to read it by moonlight, but before he had scarcely read the date, a voice cried out:

"Surrender! or by heavens, you shall die!"

The paper dropped from his hand, so like a death-knell did the words fall upon his ears. He turned his eyes and to his horror saw a score of patriots emerge from the woods and advance toward him, with muskets on a level with his breast.

"Dismount, sir, and surrender," again demanded Major Dalrymple, as, at the head of his men, he moved rapidly toward the motionless young Tory.

"I will do so, on condition that I am treated as a prisoner of war," the youth said.

"It is not for you to make conditions, sir," returned the major; "nothing but an unconditional surrender will be accepted."

"Oh, that indeed!" replied Prodigal Tom, sarcastically; "well, as you are only about twenty against me, I presume I will have to accede to your imperative demand."

So saying, he dismounted and gave himself up, when he was at once conducted back to camp. Here he was disarmed and searched, and among the effects found upon his person, was a leather case containing two queer-looking instruments and two vials of liquids that puzzled the whole command. Even the erudite surgeon Eleazer Gwynpape, with all his medical and surgical lore, was unable to assign the liquids any place in the *Materia Medica*, or recall the purpose to which the instruments could be applied in surgery.

Both instruments were alike, sharp as needles at one end and hollow to the very point. They suggested the idea of a druggist's dropping-tube, but were too delicate to be used for that purpose.

Upon Surgeon Gwynpape deciding that both instruments and liquids were perfectly harmless, they were returned to their owner.

Major Dalrymple knew that the prisoner had been considered a British spy, and that he had been known to pass the American lines in disguise; but whether he would be considered a spy, captured as he was, became a question of doubt in the patriot camp, and to settle the matter, a courier was dispatched to Washington with news of his capture, and asking instructions in the matter.

It was noon the next day when the courier returned from Morristown with this characteristic reply:

"MAJOR HOMER DALRYMPLE: You are hereby invested with full power and authority to try Prodigal Tom as a British spy. If found guilty, he will not be executed, of course, without my approval."

"GEORGE WASHINGTON."

"MORRISTOWN, Jan. —, 1777."

This reply was not altogether unexpected by Dalrymple, and yet he would gladly have evaded the duty that Tom's capture devolved upon him, could he have done so honorably. He regretted that the stern necessities of war required such duty of any man. He could face an enemy in battle, but his very soul shrank from the thought of taking a prisoner's life. But what could he do, unless it was to refuse to do his duty? The law was inexorable, and Prodigal Tom must be placed on trial as a spy.

The preliminaries were soon arranged, and then the trial began; but we will not attempt to give the whole proceedings which occupied two days. Suffice it to say that Prodigal Tom was found guilty and sentenced to be hung as a spy.

The sentence was made out in writing and sent, in care of a courier, to Washington for his signature approving of the same.

On the day of Tom's conviction, Doctor Dave, the Indian nomad, made his appearance in the patriot camp.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE 'COON-HUNTERS.

We left Colonel Fairmont's black servants, six in number, on their way to the 'coon-grounds in the valley of the Raritan. They were led by old Grindy, whom we have met before, and whose heart was enlisted in the cause of freedom.

'Coon-hunting was a favorite amusement of Fairmont's servants, and, although the sport was somewhat out of season in January, they had spent nearly every night for the past two weeks in the woods.

They pushed their way rapidly and silently through the forest until the "game-grounds" were reached, when old Grindy, and the lad to whom Agnes had given the basket of provision, left the main party and pressed on into a deep valley, where the darkness and density of the woods rendered the blackness of night intense. This however, proved no impediment to the advance of the darkeys, and they hurried on until their footsteps were arrested by a stone wall in which there was a door opening into an excavation in the steep hillside.

This cavern had been dug there by Fairmont's blacks years before. It had been used by them as a sort of a rendezvous upon their hunting excursions. Over and around the place time had added its growth of shrubbery and vines until it was as completely hidden from the view as it was possible for it to have been.

Into 'Coon Cave, as the darkeys called the place, old Grindy led the way; then in the darkness of the retreat the sound of voices arose—voices whose tremulous tones denoted feebleness of strength.

In a few minutes the old man and his young companion came out of the cave, closed the door behind them, and then crept softly away.

Out in the forest they rejoined their comrades when all struck out in search of 'coon and 'possum. They freed their dog from the leash to range the woods.

As the party moved on, phantom-like through the darkness, an old owl scrambling out of a tree overhead, or the boom of a night-jar's wing would startle them, ever and anon, with sudden fear and regret; for the sounds were ill-omens to them.

"Cussfoun' de luck," growled old Grindy after an hour's hunting in vain, "guess as what ebery 'coon and 'possum has took his family and depa'ted."

"I jist knowed we'd not find ennything when I heard dem owls and dem 'jars,'" said Joe Buckhorn; "when dey are out, de 'coon and 'possum are in, dat am a scientific fact."

"Dar! by geminly frost!" suddenly burst from old Grindy's lips, "dat dog, Box, has treed sumfin now. Ki, yi! come 'long, boys," and away went the party at the top of their speed, directing their course by the barking of the dog.

On over hill and valley, through thicket and bramble—with the headlong impetuosity of wild men, they rushed, as though each one was trying to outstrip the other in a race to the dog.

Old as he was, Grindy finally reached the animal ahead of his companions.

Out of breath, almost, they all stopped to rest and listen.

It struck old Grindy, at once, that the dog was acting unusually queer for an old 'coon-dog, and spoke of it to his companions.

"Mebby he's got a bear or painter treed, Grindy," said Buckhorn.

"Sumfin dat's not a coon or 'possum shoah'n shootin'—Lord! did you hear dat?"

"It war sumfin dat guggled-like," said Buckhorn.

"I sw'ar it war a ghost, Grindy," exclaimed another.

"Go 'long wid your foolishin'," reproved the old darkey, "dar ar'n't no sich things as ghostesee, your black, superstitia' nigger. But I tells you dar's

sumfin not right round heah, and I'se gwine to vestigation it dis mortal seerond."

He started slowly and carefully forward with his hands outstretched before him; and he had gone but a few paces when something swung against his finger-tips, but at once oscillated beyond his touch. He started with a sort of a vague shudder, reached out a little further and when the object swung back he seized it. It was a human body still warm and quiver with life. It was suspended to a limb between heaven and earth.

"I'se found it, boys!" exclaimed old Grindy, "and it's a man hangin' to a limb. He's warm and jerky yit—specks he's not dead—give a boost here, and let's ease him down."

They cut the rope and placed the body at full length upon the ground. Grindy felt his pulse, and found that it was not entirely gone; and without a moment's delay, the simplest remedy known to the darkeys was at once applied for the resuscitation of the feeble spark left in the body of the unknown. Nor were their kind, humane efforts in vain. Signs of returning consciousness were soon manifested; and as soon as the man was enabled to speak, though incoherently, Grindy said to his companions:

"Boys, I know he's another patriot dat dem orner-Tories have tried to kill; but praise de Lord, dey'll git foolish'd ag'in. We mus' jist tote him right off to de 'Coon Cave, fo'thwith. I reckon as what one snifter from dat bottle what de young missus send to de patriots will jist h'ist him right up."

Old Grindy's words were imperative; and as there was no appeal from his decisions, he always had his way among his black friends. And in a few minutes a rude litter had been constructed, the stranger placed upon it and the course of the 'coon-hunters shaped toward the hidden cavern.

CHAPTER XIX.

A STARTLING REVELATION.

CAPTAIN WALTON, *alias* British Bill, continued in camp at Cross Hollows; though the captain, himself, spent most of his time at Fairmont Place within the sunshine of Agnes Melross's lovely presence.

One day when he found old Samuel alone, he embraced the opportunity of speaking to him of the matter that lay nearest his heart.

"Colonel," he said, "you have doubtless wondered why I have made Fairmont Place so many visits of late, have you not?"

"Well, really, captain, I haven't wondered much about it," responded the old man, "for I have a pretty good idea. In my grand-daughter, I know there is an attraction that would lure a king from his throne."

"You speak truthfully, colonel; but I have wondered at your not penetrating a secret connected with my visits at Fairmont Place."

"Bill—Captain Walton," said the old man, sternly, "I beg you will not attempt to win Agnes's love. It is true, I owe you much, but as I have told you before, she is betrothed to her cousin Clement Fairmont whom I have been expecting over from England the past year, to claim her in marriage. The Fairmonts' fair name shall not perish with old Samuel. But, captain, why do you smile? Do you think me an old fool?—a heartless wretch?"

"Not at all, colonel," answered British Bill, "but I'll soon tell you why—look at that letter," and from a package that he had brought with him, he took a paper and passed it to Fairmont.

The old man looked it over. He at once recognized it being in his own hand-writing, and to his surprise and astonishment, found it was the last letter he had written to Clement Fairmont of Darnly, Yorkshire, England.

A cry burst from the old man's lips.

"How came you by this?" he asked.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the young royalist, "I came by it honorably, *since I am Clement Fairmont!*"

"My Redeemer!" burst from the colonel's lips, as he started to his feet, "can this be true, can it, I say?"

"It is a fact, grandfather," replied the captain; "here are papers and documents sufficient to convince you of the fact."

He produced a number of letters written by the colonel, himself, to Clement Fairmont within the past five years. He also produced some old family records reaching back over a period of thirty years. They were arranged in chronological order, and some of the first the old colonel recognized, having assisted Clement's father in writing them before he left England.

It had been eighteen years since the old man had seen Clement Fairmont; and in that time he had grown from a child of a few years to manhood. Of course, he did not recognize him as he bore little resemblance to the Fairmonts; but the letters and papers placed identity beyond a doubt, and springing to his feet the colonel seized the captain's hand and in tones full of the deepest emotions, welcomed him to Fairmont Place. And then after the excitement had subsided, he exclaimed:

"Boy, why have you kept your identity so secret?"

"My object, you will approve of, I know, grandfather. Knowing that Agnes Melross was to marry a man she had never seen, I was afraid she would take a dislike to me as that person, and profiting by the example of the Oriental prince, King of Bucharia, I resolved to gain her affections before I made myself known. Before leaving England, I purchased a commission of captain in the royal service, that I might be enabled to carry out my purpose without detection; and under the name of Captain Walton, British Bill, and so forth, have I been known hereabouts; but there is my commission to Clement Fairmont."

"Ah, my boy!" exclaimed the old man, taking the paper and glancing over it with a smile of delight,

"you have taken a wise and judicious plan in bringing about the meeting between you and Agnes, and I think you have won by it. I have been afraid all along that you were winning Agnes's affections; and felt anxious for your departure from this vicinity on that account. My son, you have the Fairmont pride, foresight and courage. But how long has it been since you landed in America?"

"Eight months ago I landed at New York, and set out in this direction, raising my little company of partisans as I came. So you see, now, why I have hung around Fairmont Place as I have."

"Bravo! my lad; you are worthy of the name of Fairmont, whose national pride and chivalric devotion can be traced back to the gallant knights of the Middle Ages; and—"

At this juncture Agnes Melross entered the room, unaware of British Bill's presence.

"Agnes, my child," the old man exclaimed before she had even time to speak, "I have a happy surprise for you. It has just been revealed to me that this gallant young captain is Clement Fairmont. Welcome him, my daughter, to Fairmont Place, his future home."

But Agnes did no such a thing. She was so thunderstruck by the unwelcome news that she turned deadly pale, and staggering, fell in a dead faint at the feet of British Bill.

"Poor child!" exclaimed the old colonel, "the joyful news was too much for her sensitive nature."

A momentary excitement prevailed. Agnes was conveyed into an adjoining chamber and placed upon a bed; while old Mrs. Fairmont and Kathleen, the housekeeper, busied themselves in restoring her to consciousness.

For a while the maiden's life was despaired of, but no sooner were signs of returning consciousness manifested, than the heartless old Samuel and his grandson returned to the sitting-room to make arrangements for the consummation of the latter's marriage with Agnes.

"It must not be delayed an hour longer than possible, Clement," the old man said. "I have had a presentiment that I am not long for this world; and I want to see the event, which must needs perpetuate the name of the Fairmonts, celebrated before I die. Suppose we get to-morrow evening for the wedding, my son. That will be far enough off, I am sure, for all arrangements. I will see Parson Findley, our neighbor, and secure his services for the occasion. He is a dyed-in-the-wool Whig, but then he'll not hesitate to do anything in his line for a crown or two of silver."

British Bill made no objection to the old man's arrangements. On the contrary, they seemed to please him, for he readily acquiesced in every particular.

When Agnes had fully recovered from her swoon, the captain was admitted to her presence. They held a long, and apparently happy, conversation. British Bill spoke of the love he had entertained for her since he first saw her; and while she made no declaration of reciprocal affection, he felt assured that she loved him. They talked but little of their future, but when their interview ended, and the captain rose to leave, he said:

"I shall now go back to camp, Agnes, and by to-morrow evening I hope to see you feeling as though you were supremely happy over the event that is to make us man and wife forever."

Agnes colored slightly, and although she made no resistance to his kissing her brow, her heart grew sick with loathing scorn; and the face of Delaware Dick, to whom she had plighted her love, rose before her mental vision, filling her soul with the most torturous emotions.

CHAPTER XX.

CORNWALLIS INTERVIEWS GERALDINE MELINOTT.

LORD CORNWALLIS was both mortified and enraged when he discovered that General Washington had escaped from him at Trenton and marched upon Princeton while he was resting in full confidence of a great and brilliant victory over the rebel arms. In fact, the sudden and unexpected change in the situation, at once put him upon the defensive—taxing his utmost skill and generalship to prevent his defeat turning into an inglorious panic.

As soon as he had discovered Washington's movements, Cornwallis abandoned his own camp and marched rapidly toward New Brunswick, fearing lest the baggage and military stores collected there should fall into the hands of the victorious enemy. He reached Princeton just as Washington was leaving, and as the latter felt that he was in no condition to give battle, owing to two days and nights' overwork, he crossed the river, destroyed the bridge, and moved rapidly away toward the upper regions of New Jersey, and finally encamped at Morristown. Here his suffering army sought rest and repose, and a respite from the arduous duty of the field to celebrate the victories of Trenton and Princeton.

Cornwallis pushed on to New Brunswick, where he went into camp to await further orders from Sir Henry Clinton. He made his own headquarters in the house of a citizen loyal to the crown, and here, on the day following his arrival, he assembled his generals in council.

The latter were greatly depressed in spirit by their recent losses, and threatened recovery of the Jerseys by Washington; and after all had freely expressed themselves on the subject, Cornwallis said:

"In my opinion, the victories of the rebels are all owing to the perfect and regular system of communications kept up between the two armies by their spies, of whom Delaware Dick was the most notorious. And in this efficient branch of the service they have a decided advantage over us. The royal and rebel element in the colonies are one people; or, in other words, one family whose members it is hard to discriminate. We have got to

extend every favor to those of professed sympathy with the king; and this gives the enemy's spies a golden opportunity by their taking advantage of our kindness. On the other hand, a friend of ours can seek no refuge in the American camp, even by the most perfidious and artful treachery. With the rebels, a man must either be a soldier in their ranks, or else he is persecuted as a Tory. Therefore, our spies have a dozen dangers to risk where the rebel spies have but one."

"Prodigal Tom, my lord, has been a successful spy," said one of the generals.

"For whom?"

"Why, the king, of course," answered the officer, surprised at Cornwallis's question.

At this juncture an orderly entered and announced the presence of one Wesley Marble, who was desirous of seeing the commander.

"Show him in at once," said Cornwallis, eagerly, "I desire a private interview with him."

This was a hint for the officers to retire, and the next moment Wesley Marble, the Tory, was ushered into the general's presence.

"Well, Mr. Marble," said the commandant, "I suppose you have been busy since we last met."

"Yes, indeed, general," replied Marble, "but not as busy as Washington has kept you. I didn't think he'd men enough to whip a corporal's guard."

"Of this, Mr. Marble, you can speak another time," said the British general, displeased at being reminded by every Tory of his late disastrous campaign; "but if you have anything to report concerning the Melinott family, I shall be pleased to hear it."

"I have a good report to make, general," answered the old Tory; "by tracing them up, I succeeded in finding the widow Melinott and her daughter, Geraldine."

"Ah, indeed!" exclaimed the general.

"Yes; and what is more, they are living in New Brunswick, and upon this very street, three doors south."

"Then one or both of them shall be summoned here at once," said Cornwallis, and touching a bell on the table at his side, an orderly immediately answered the call.

"Glaston," the general said, addressing the orderly, "I have a request to make of you. It is that you proceed to the residence of the widow Melinott three doors south on this street, and request the widow and her daughter to call at my quarters without delay."

"But, suppose they refuse to come, general," said the orderly.

"Impress upon their minds the importance of their coming without delay. Tell them that I desire to see them upon a matter of interest to themselves."

Glaston retired and at once proceeded to the residence designated. He found the mother and daughter alone. The former was an elderly lady of some fifty years, whose calm, composed features were indicative of patient suffering and silent fortitude.

The daughter was not over eighteen, and possessed of a stately form and features that were wonderful in their beauty and power of expression. Her eyes were of a dark brown, and as they met those of the orderly, he felt that they were possessed of a necromantic power—the power of noble womanhood radiated from a pure and spotless soul.

Orderly Glaston at once introduced himself, and turning to the elderly female, said:

"Madame, I am requested to say, that the presence of yourself and daughter is required at the quarters of his excellency, Lord Cornwallis."

"For what?" asked Geraldine, with imperious dignity.

"I know not, more than that it is for something concerning yourselves."

The mother and daughter exchanged glances, and while the color faded from the face of the former, and fear seemed to seize upon her heart, the face of the other flushed crimson, her eyes flashed scorn, and her whole countenance assumed a look of disdain.

"Has Cornwallis come here to make war upon women?" the young woman demanded.

"Not at all, madame," answered the officer, politely.

"Suppose, then, we ignore his summons?"

"I advise you, ladies, to see him. It will save you the embarrassment of having the general call upon you."

"Mother," said Geraldine, "I will go alone to Cornwallis's presence. I fear him not, nor his designs."

To this the mother made no dissent, and so attiring herself, Geraldine set out for the commandant's head-quarters, accompanied by Orderly Glaston. In a few minutes she was ushered into the general's presence, and introduced to him.

Cornwallis received her with as much ceremony and politeness as though she had been one of the highest born ladies of the realm; and as soon as she had been seated, he said:

"Miss Melinott, it almost seems that I am acquainted with you, having known your brother, Prodigal Tom, so long. And I have not your brother, Delaware Dick, to whom you bear a remarkable resemblance."

"You have heard, have you not, general, that my brother Dick was killed in the Raritan valley a few days ago?" Geraldine said.

"The sad intelligence reached my ears yesterday; and I now desire to express my kindest sympathy for you and your mother in your affliction. I sincerely regret that Dick ever exposed the cause that arrayed him against his brother and king, and led to his untimely death."

"I am sorry, general," Geraldine exclaimed, with

all the fervency of her soul, "that I have no other friends to give in the cause of freedom."

"You have already lost a father and brother, I believe," observed Cornwallis.

"Yes; my father was murdered by British Bills' Tories; he was not killed."

"Miss Melinott," said Cornwallis, fixing a searching look upon the young woman's face, "I have just learned that you never had but one brother, and that his name was Thomas R. Melinott."

Geraldine was taken completely by surprise. A thunderbolt from the wintry sky would not have surprised her more. The color faded from her face, and fixing a half-despairing look upon the face of the wily general, she said:

"Who is it that presumes to know more of my family, than I do myself?"

"One Wesley Marble," replied Cornwallis.

"As vile a Tory as ever burned a Patriot home," returned Geraldine, her eyes flashing with indignation.

"Then you do not deny his assertion, Miss Melinott?"

"I deny nothing—I make no concessions one way or another. You know who Delaware Dick was, and who Prodigal Tom is; and so let that suffice."

"Very well, Miss Melinott," the British general said, touching the bell at his side, in answer to which the orderly appeared, "this is all that I wished to see you about. You will please accept my kindest wishes and regards for your and your mother's welfare. Glaston, you will now escort Miss Melinott home."

Cornwallis accompanied her to the door and kindly bidding her good-day, returned to his table and seating himself, took up a pen and hastily dashed off a note.

Then he summoned Sergeant Loveridge, his special courier, to whom he gave the paper, saying:

"Sergeant, I have a hard ride for you: take this dispatch, and ride with all speed to Fairmont Place, twenty-five miles south of here, and deliver it into the hands of Captain Walton, alias British Bill. Guard it with your life, and halt not until the camp of the partisan is reached."

"General, your command shall be obeyed," replied Sergeant Loveridge; and bowing himself out of the general's presence, he mounted his horse and galloped away upon his mission.

But little did the thousands, who had heard the name of Delaware Dick and Prodigal Tom mentioned daily for the past year in the valley of the Delaware, dream of the startling facts contained in the dispatch sent to British Bill.

CHAPTER XXI.

NOT APPROVED.

As the courier, sent to obtain Washington's approval of Prodigal Tom's sentence as a British spy, would be compelled to journey to Morristown where the general had taken up his winter quarters, he could not reasonably be expected back short of two days; and for fear of an attempt being made by the enemy to release the condemned man, Major Dalrymple, of the dragoons, and Lieutenant Banks, of the Scarlet Wings, moved their camp down to Clay's Point, a little village or settlement of about a dozen log houses, half of which were unoccupied. This placed them about six miles from British Bill's camp.

They took up their quarters in the deserted cabins; and as the people remaining in the village were all Patriots, the soldiers were hospitably entertained.

Guards were posted on all the roads and by-ways converging at that point; and every precaution taken to guard against surprise. And it was well that they did all this, for they had scarcely passed a day in the village when British Bill came sweeping down from Fairmont Place like a whirlwind, and attempted to carry every thing before them by storm. But they were promptly met by a deadly fire from the Patriots whom they had expected to take by surprise, but who really turned out to be the surprise party.

A dozen of the enemy were unhorsed at the first fire, which terrible loss caused the Tories to check their advance, when they were soon driven back under cover of the woods.

Feeling certain, however, of their ability to dislodge the patriots, the enemy dismounted, and forming upon foot within the forest, they charged upon the Americans again.

The latter were posted in a good position behind a garden-wall, and were enabled to see the enemy the moment they issued from the woods and pour a destructive fire into their ranks. Before half the distance between the woods and fence had been traversed, British Bill fell seriously wounded. This terminated the battle, and, with their wounded captain, the Tories again withdrew into the woods. Here they held a short consultation, when it was decided to give up the battle, and withdraw in the direction of Fairmont Place to await reinforcements.

Ignorant of this decision, however, our friends expected another attack the coming night, and so they made preparations to meet it. Prodigal Tom was securely locked in one of the strongest buildings, and a double guard placed over him. When the soldiers lay down to rest, it was with their guns at their sides.

Thus the first hours of night passed quietly away; a horseman, galloping up from the direction of New Brunswick, was suddenly halted by a voice issuing from the shadows by the roadside; and two patriot sentinels confronted him.

Involuntarily the man drew up, and before he could recover from his surprise sufficiently to act, one of the sentinels seized his animal by the bits, while the other, presenting the muzzle of a musket to his breast, said:

"Dismount, sir Britisher, or you'll receive the contents of this gun."

"Confound your rebel skins," began the man; but he was promptly checked by the sentinel, who exclaimed:

"Not a word, or I'll splatter your brains all over the night."

"It's strength that gives you courage," said the man dismounting, and giving himself up; "but I'd have you know that Gershom Loveridge is no coward; nor is he a fool to contend with such odds."

"Of course not, Gershom," replied one of his captors. "We observe you are a brave and sensible man, and, therefore, will march you up to head-quarters and introduce you to Major Dalrymple."

Having relieved the courier of his weapons they searched his pockets, his boots, and, in fact, every place where any secret papers might be concealed; and the very last place they looked, they found a folded paper. Holding it up to the moonlight, they were enabled to see it was superscribed to Captain William Walton.

Without attempting to read the note, the sentinels waited until the corporal of the guard came around and relieved them, when they proceeded at once to camp, and delivered the prisoner and his dispatch over to Major Dalrymple.

The latter was seated, in company with Harry Banks and several of the Scarlet Wings, before a roaring fire, in one of the cabins; and as he took the dispatch and turned to the light to read it, the door opened, and a man entered the room amid the murmur of excited voices.

Dalrymple turned to the new-comer, and, to his surprise, saw that it was the courier whom he had dispatched to Washington's head-quarters for the general's signature to Prodigal Tom's death-sentence.

"Why, Corporal Jarvis!" he exclaimed, "you have taken us completely by surprise. We were not expecting you so soon."

"I have had a long, hard ride of it through frosty nights and chilly winds," replied the courier, seating himself before the cheery fire.

"And you saw Washington, of course," said Dalrymple.

"Yes; he is at Morristown, and will remain there through the winter," the corporal answered, with a provoking ease of manner, as if courting the interest centered in him, and, apparently, desirous of working his friends' anxiety up to the highest pitch of excitement. He removed his gloves, and held his palms before the glowing fire. He warmed his feet, one at a time; yawned drowsily, then arose, and from the lining of his hat produced a paper which he placed in Dalrymple's hand.

All knew what it was, and as the major unfolded the paper, his friends gathered around him almost breathless with suspense.

"Let us have order, now, soldiers," exclaimed the commandant, "and I will read Washington's approval."

A dead silence, broken only by the roar of the fire on the hearth and the whistle of the wind outside, prevailed.

In a deep, strong voice, the major read:

"The sentence of Prodigal Tom, as a British Spy, is not approved. You will, therefore, release the prisoner."

GEORGE WASHINGTON."

The little band of patriots were thunderstruck by this order of their commander-in-chief; and a murmur of dissatisfaction and dissent rose from every lip. The major himself was astonished. He could see no just reason for liberating the young Tory and spy. He had been proven guilty by the most convincing evidence; but this, it is true, had not been submitted to Washington, as Dalrymple did not suppose the general would take exceptions to his course of action after having intrusted the trial of Prodigal Tom to him and his command.

"Boys," the major said, "I am astonished by Washington's course in this matter."

"We are all astonished, major," cried a Scarlet Wing, "and I, for one, declare that Prodigal Tom shall die!"

"Ay! ay!" chorused a dozen voices. And the words of the Scarlet Wing soon became kindled into a mutinous blaze that spread through the camp like wild fire.

Major Dalrymple saw at once the course the mutiny would take, and endeavored to quell it; but as well might he have attempted to check the onward rush of a torrent. Never before had his followers shown such an utter disregard of his commands; their very souls seemed filled with the spirit of rebellious nature; and he knew that Washington's own orders would be ignored, and the prisoner become the victim of an infuriated mob. In such a case, the major knew that he would be held amenable for the deed, and to avert such a calamity now became the great object of his mind.

Finding that there was no prospect of quelling the riot, he stole out of his quarters toward the building in which Prodigal Tom was confined. Arrived at the door, he made himself known to the guard, who permitted him to pass into the prison.

In a few moments he came rushing out, and exclaimed:

"Man! what are you guarding here?"

"A prisoner—Prodigal Tom, of course," was the answer.

"You are not—you are guarding an empty house," said the major; "Prodigal Tom has escaped. Has treachery or bribery set him at liberty?"

"Neither, major," replied the guard, with terror; "upon my word and honor as a soldier—as true as there is a heaven, I have let no one but you pass out at this door to-night."

"I dare say you have not, for the back-door is

upon," replied Dalrymple, dubiously; "and I am afraid the fury of the soldiers will lead them to acts of violence, when this becomes known."

"They will tear me to pieces—" began the guard but before he had finished, two score of soldiers, carrying flaming torches, and headed by the Scarlet Wings, came rushing toward the cabin evidently bent upon destruction. At the door of the cabin they were met by the guard, with fixed bayonet, and Major Dalrymple. They were clamoring for the blood of the prisoner, but were calmly informed by the major that the subject of their proposed disgrace had escaped.

A cry of dismay and baffled rage escaped every lip, and for a moment their bitter indignation found expression in threats of vengeance and execrations.

Major Dalrymple endeavored to explain to them how the prisoner had escaped, and exonerate the guard from all blame; but his words were answered with cries of derision. The guard now became the object of their fury, and the mob was closing in around him when a sharp, piercing whistle thrilled through the chill, crispy air, and startled the Scarlet Wings as though the horn of Gabriel, itself, had suddenly announced the end of time.

The whistle, though keen and sharp, came forth upon the night with a peculiar wavering intonation that would have been hard to imitate; and what called the attention of the Scarlet Wings so particularly was its being an exact imitation of Delaware Dick's wonderful signal, which combined the whole code of the Scarlet Wings' secret communication.

The infuriated mob became motionless, silent. The torches were held aloft—their flickering beams of light throwing a weird, death-like pallor over the three-score of fixed faces around.

"Harry," said one of the Scarlet Wings to young Banks, "that was Delaware Dick's signal as true as I ever heard it."

"My God!" exclaimed Banks, "can it be possible that he is alive—that he escaped from—"

Before he could finish, the veritable Delaware Dick, himself, in blood and flesh, appeared before him.

Had the young patriot risen out of his grave to rebuke his followers for their unsoldierly conduct toward his brother, Prodigal Tom, they would not have been more completely overcome. They started back with wild astonishment and fear upon their faces.

A low, pleasant laugh burst from the lips of Delaware Dick. It broke the horrible spell that was causing his men to recoil before him; and then like a wave they closed in around him, and shouts of joy pealed from their lips.

For several minutes the wildest confusion reigned, and when it finally began to subside, Major Dalrymple, with a torch in one hand and the dispatch taken from the British courier, Loveridge, in the other, mounted a stump and exclaimed:

"One moment, fellow-soldiers; I hold in my hand the dispatch taken from the enemy's courier to-night, and which I had forgotten until this moment. It will throw some light on the appearance of Delaware Dick here; and the disappearance of Prodigal Tom."

A dead silence fell upon the party. In a clear, metallic voice the major read:

"CAPTAIN WILLIAM WALTON:

Sir—you will lose no time in placing Prodigal Tom under arrest. I have been convinced beyond a doubt that Delaware Dick and Prodigal Tom are one and the same person, however strange it may appear to you—one whose conduct, sympathies and power of deception must brand him the most infamous spy in the service of George Washington.

"Your obedient servant, etc.,
"MAJ-GEN. CORNWALLIS."

A cry of astonishment burst from every lip, and then followed a general rush of torches and men toward the spot where Delaware Dick stood; and the excited throng became as wild with enthusiasm and joy as it had been fierce with the spirit of rage and vengeance.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SECRET OF THAT LITTLE CASE.

It was an hour before the excitement, occasioned by the return of Delaware Dick, as if from the grave, subsided in the camp at Clay's Point. The Scarlet Wings had never entertained the faintest hope of their young leader being alive. They felt certain that he had fallen a victim at the conflict in Samuel Fairmont's library. However, when all had become quiet, and the Scarlet Wings with Dick repaired to their quarters in one of the cabin's, Harry Banks said:

"Dick, you don't mean to say that there is any truth contained in that dispatch of Cornwallis, do you?"

"Well, really, Harry, if there was any show of me making the secret useful in behalf of our cause again, I would be very clear of revealing it; but since the whole has been exploded, I must confess the truth of Cornwallis's suspicions; I am Prodigal Tom, as well as Delaware Dick."

"Impossible! impossible!" thundered Surgeon Eleazar Gwynplane; "you don't favor Prodigal Tom more than the major there does a mud fence."

"Then you think I am trying to shield my brother, Tom, do you, surgeon?"

"Ahem!—well," stammered the surgeon, "I did not say so."

"No, but you thought so; but the fact of it is, I never had a brother, and the whole secret lies right here," and Delaware Dick produced the very case of instruments and vials of liquids that had been found upon the person of Prodigal Tom. "Just about a year before the beginning of the war, I had occasion

to spend a few months hunting and fishing up among the northern waters of New York. While there, I became the guest of a young Indian chief, named Hu-ron-ah-wa, who treated me with all the civilities of a high-born gentleman. During my stay he revealed to me the secret of a great discovery that an old Indian doctor had made. That secret was a process, and a very simple one too, by which the human features could be temporarily changed beyond recognition by an intimate friend. The idea had been suggested to the old Indian doctor by the sting of a bee, which produced a swelling of the face of the one stung, and a change in his looks. Now, that doctor, like all progressive doctors, went to thinking, and—"

"Hal! hal! hal!" laughed Surgeon Gwynplane, facetiously, "talk of progression in an Indian camp—that's good."

"Well, at any rate, my dear Gwynplane, the old doctor was acquainted with the medical properties of every plant in the vegetable kingdom around him, and I daresay, some of our white doctors could take lessons of him in both medicine and surgery."

"An old root doctor—yes, yes; that's old women's medicine," protested the surgeon—"old women and herbs."

"Well, to continue," Dick went on, "there was a certain plant known to the old doctor, yielding a thin, watery liquid, a drop of which injected under the skin would produce swelling without any outward signs of inflammation or any feeling of pain. And, strange to say, that swelling would last a month, unless reduced by a counter-irritant. This, of course, the old doctor had no difficulty in obtaining, in the juice of another plant. So much for the idea suggested by the sting of a bee. Hu-ron-ah-wa had the old doctor demonstrate his discovery while I was there. A young Indian girl, very pretty and shy, presented herself for the experiment to be tried upon. The doctor put a drop of the liquid in a hollow, steel needle that he had made himself, and then inserted the point into the skin under the eyebrows. As the point was withdrawn, the liquid flowed out into the wound, and in a few minutes the delicately-pencilled brows of the girl were heavy and beetling—giving her a downcast and sullen look. I would never have known her, had I not seen the operation performed. In the course of a few hours, another needle was filled with the counter-poison and the point inserted under the skin near the first wound, and—well, I was surprised. In ten minutes' time that girl was herself again. All the swelling had disappeared, and there was no more trace of the operation left than a musketo bite would produce."

Surgeon Gwynplane looked reflectively into the fire, while the soldiers with bated breath listened to the young spy's story.

"When the war broke out," continued Dick, "I resolved to serve my country to the best of my ability; and to act in a double capacity—as a spy to Washington and the British, with my sympathies, of course, on the patriot side. In order to do this I must needs disguise myself, and happening to think of the old Indian doctor's discovery, I determined to see him and obtain the secret. So I rode up to Hu-ron-ah-wa's lodge, and succeeded in obtaining from the old doctor these two vials of liquids. Then I went to New York and had a manufacturer of surgical instruments make me these two hollow needles. Returning home, I tested the matter thoroughly. By operating on my eyebrows, my cheeks, lips and nose, I absolutely frightened my mother and sister. They didn't know me, nor would they believe it was I till I applied the counter-poison and reduced the swelling. Then they were astonished. I told them what I intended to do—that as Prodigal Tom, I intended to serve the enemy or British; and, as Delaware Dick, the patriots; and that I wished to convey to the world that there were two Melinott boys, Tom and Dick. Of course, there were some of our neighbors that knew better, and in order to keep the matter away from positive proof as long as possible, I had my mother and sister move out of the Delaware valley and conceal themselves. Then I went to work; first I raised my band of Scarlet Wings, and got them into working order, and made a name—Delaware Dick, the Wing-of-the-Wind. This much accomplished, I disguised my features by the process already explained, and went over into a Tory district in Pennsylvania, and by representing myself as Delaware Dick's brother, raised and equipped a company of rangers; and for this act I at once became known as Prodigal Tom by friends and foes."

"Then that explains why you were absent from us so often," said a Scarlet Wing; "and why we could never draw Prodigal Tom into a fight; one man commanded the two battalions."

"It is singular we didn't mistrust something of the kind before," added another, "for I now begin to see what Dick meant when he spoke in riddles at different times, about 'a power behind the throne.' Ever since our company has been organized, I have noticed that we have been constantly dogged by one strange personage, and that is the Indian vagabond, Doctor Dave, who has been hanging around camp here for a week. I shouldn't wonder but that he is the Indian doctor who discovered the means of your disguise, Dick, and that he has been playing between the bands of Delaware Dick and Prodigal Tom to assist you in the extreme cases."

"I have nothing to say to your surmises, friend Conrad," Dick replied evasively. "Washington, my mother and sister, and the 'power behind the throne,' are the only persons, save the All-Seeing Eye, that I know of, that knew aught of my secret up to the time Cornwallis found it out. How he did penetrate the secret is a mystery to me, though I have always entertained fears of detection. And to tell the truth, I have played the double role longer than I had expected at first, for I was afraid some

of my old Tory neighbors would reveal the fact that I had no brother Tom, and thereby lead to my exposure. But if I do say so myself, boys, I have rendered our cause some good service—so have you, my brave Scarlet Wings, and so has that mysterious friend whose name I cannot mention. But this, my friends, I hope is sufficient explanation as to my presence here alive; but had it not been for that dispatch of Cornwallis's, I should never have revealed one word of my cherished secret to you so long as I could have made it useful to our country and cause. As to how I escaped from the cabin a few months ago, I shall not tell you now."

"What is settled in my mind," said Conrad, who stood guard at the cabin door, "that old Indian, Doctor Dave, whom some of the boys suggested be drummed out of camp, has not been lurking around here the last two days for nothing in his vagabond innocence. I daresay, he's not to be found in camp now. But, Dick, how did you escape death at Fairmont Place that memorable night of the conflict?"

"Well, during the fight I was knocked senseless by a clubbed musket in the hands of a Tory. I fell near the open door, and when I came to again, I found myself in the woods. Two persons were by me: one was a negro servant of old Samuel Fairmont, and the other was—that noble friend who has been a guardian angel to me so often when death stared me in the face."

"Well, wishing the report to go abroad that Delaware Dick was dead, I concluded to remain in seclusion and so joined my band of Tory partisans and went into camp with British Bill. Being located near Fairmont Place, I had free admittance to the old man's house where, come to think of it, dwelt another that knew that Delaware Dick was not slain the night of the battle. That person was Agnes Melrose, Fairmont's lovely grand-daughter."

"Love, by Jupiter!" exclaimed Surgeon Gwynplane. "I knew it would end in this. You remember what I told you, boys, about that note found on the person of Prodigal Tom the night we captured him, don't you? Didn't I say it was some love affair? Hal! hal! hal! fool old Eleazar Gwynplane. M. D., will you?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

DEATH OF AN IMPOSTOR.

On the day following British Bill's attack on Major Dalrymple at Clay's Point, Samuel Fairmont was waited upon by a Tory who requested the old man's immediate presence at the quarters of Captain Walton at Cross Hollows. As the coming evening was the time fixed for the marriage of Agnes with the captain, the colonel supposed he was wanted regarding that affair; and without questioning the soldier, he ordered out his carriage and at once drove rapidly to Cross Hollows.

It was three hours or more before he returned, and when he did, his face bore the look of hopeless despair and sorrow.

Agnes met him at the door, and clasping him by the arm to steady his tottering form, exclaimed:

"Grandpapa, what is the matter? Are you sick?"

"Oh, God!" exclaimed the old man, sinking into a chair; "yes, Agnes, yes. I am sick of life—of the whole world and its deception."

"What has happened? Oh, dear! what has happened, grandpapa?"

"British Bill is dead, and I am glad of it," was the startling reply, spoken in a cold, hollow tone.

"Glad of it, grandpapa?" cried Agnes; "glad that your kinsman is dead?"

"Kinsman!" hissed the old man; "he was no kinsman of mine. He was an impostor, the black-hearted devil! He confessed all to me before he died."

Agnes's brain grew dizzy with the whirl of excitement born of the moment. She sat down on a sofa, and, for a moment, a dead silence reigned in the parlor. Presently the colonel turned his chair, and facing her, said:

"Agnes, I shudder when I think of how near I came of ruining your life and happiness, by forcing you to wed one who had produced all the evidence I could have asked of his being Clement Fairmont. But last night, thank the Lord, British Bill went down to Clay's Point and attacked a party of provincials there, and not only got whipped, but received a wound of which he died a few minutes ago. Before he died, however, he confessed to me that, on last Wednesday, he intercepted a young British captain on the road near here, and upon searching his effects found that he was Captain Clement Fairmont, who was coming to our place. He had been captured by the Americans at Princeton, but was free on parole. As I had in confidence told British Bill all our family secrets—especially your engagement to your cousin, whose coming was daily expected—he resolved to take advantage of it, and step into Clement's shoes and wed you. So he kept Clement a prisoner until night set in, then he sent him on toward Fairmont; but, with two men, he followed him, overtook him, and, having secured all his papers, took him out into the woods and hung him dead."

Here the old man broke down and sobbed bitterly; but finally recovering his composure, he continued:

"Then with these papers—those letters of mine to Clement, and those old family documents that have been in our family a hundred years—he came here, and, bold and fearless wretch that he was, made me believe that he was Clement Fairmont. All the time that he has been hanging around Fairmont Place, it has been to win your love. If he had been away fighting where he was needed, our mansion would to-day be standing. And, Agnes, the bullet that ended the life of British Bill has made a patriot of me! Henceforth, I shall devote my life and means to the cause of the colonists!"

"Oh, grandpapa," cried Agnes, springing to her

feet, and clasping her arms about the old man's neck, "it fills my soul with delight to hear you speak thus."

"Agnes," said the old man, "why have you always been such an ardent patriot?"

"Grandpapa," answered Agnes, her eyes beaming with the soul of love and joy, "it is because I love a patriot soldier."

"I thought so all along, my child. But who is that patriot?"

"Delaware Dick."

"Delaware Dick?" cried the colonel. "Do you mean to tell me that you loved Delaware Dick?"

"Yes, grandpapa; and I love him yet."

"But he is dead, my child—both he and Clement are dead."

"Grandpapa Fairmont," returned the maiden, smiling through her tears, "I have a happy surprise for you."

"Ah, indeed, my child?"

"Yes; if you are a patriot now, you must be rejoiced to learn that Delaware Dick is living."

"Heavens! what next?" exclaimed the colonel.

"What next? Why, grandpapa, Clement Fairmont is not dead either."

"Oh, Lord!" burst from the old man's lips, and, leaning forward, he gazed into Agnes's face as though he doubted what she said. "If this is true, how much longer would you have kept it from me?"

"Not much longer—I'd have told it in time to keep from marrying British Bill. Clement Fairmont is here now."

As she spoke, the door leading into the adjoining room was opened, and a young man in the uniform of a British captain entered the room, followed by old Grindy, the darkey.

"This, grandpapa," said Agnes, "is Clement Fairmont."

The young officer advanced, and, taking the old man's hand, said:

"My dear old relative, it affords me pleasure to meet you at last."

Samuel Fairmont burst into tears. In the pale, yet handsome face of the young officer, he beheld the features of his own dead boy—the father of Clement; and in his voice there was that familiar sound, which carried him back to happier days. Intuition told him that this man was no impostor; and after he had mastered his emotion, he exclaimed:

"Oh, my children! my children! what a day this has been to me."

"Compose yourself, grandfather," said Clement, "for all is now understood."

"Ah, my boy! tell me how it comes that you are here at this moment," said the colonel; "tell me all."

"Your faithful servant here brought me to the house an hour or so ago, by direction of Agnes. Since the night that British Bill attempted my life I have been concealed in a cavern near here, and taken care of by your negroes, who rescued me from death while coon-hunting."

"God bless their black skins!" exclaimed the colonel, joyfully, "each and all of them shall have a quarter-section of his own. But, Clement, how long has it been since you came to America?"

"Nearly a year; and I should have been here sooner, but having purchased a captain's commission in the army before leaving home, I was placed under Cornwallis and kept at my post up to the time of my capture at Princeton. But, grandfather, I am going to resign my commission. I believe this war on the colonies is unjust."

"I have become a patriot myself, Clement, within the last hour. I have received less kindness and favors from the British in America than the Americans themselves."

Thus they talked on for more than an hour. Grindy and Agnes had retired, leaving the old man and his grand son alone; and when the conversation had finally introduced the subject, the former said:

"So I presume, Clement, you have come to fulfill your marriage contract with Agnes."

"I left England for that purpose, grandfather; but since I arrived in America I have had cause to ignore our childhood betrothal, and plight myself to a patriot lady over in the Delaware Valley."

"Ah! just as I expected," exclaimed the old man; "but it's all right, Clement. I shall not insist on your wedding Agnes, for she, too, loves another—Delaware Dick."

"A brave and noble fellow is Delaware Dick, grandfather. I have known him nearly a year—even recognized him when a spy in camp, and when two words would have condemned him. But I had pledged his mother and sister that I would not betray him, and so I kept my word."

"Ah! his mother and sister! did you make the latter no other promise?" the old man demanded, as the light drifted in upon his mind.

"Yes," the young man frankly responded, "I promised to make her my wife."

"I thought so. Well, God's will be done. Let us rejoice that it is even so," said the old man, contentedly and with resignation.

Toward the close of the day rumors reached Fairmont Place that a body of provincial troops under Major Dalrymple and Delaware Dick was approaching from the east, ostensibly for the purpose of attacking the forces under British Bill, encamped at Cross Hollows; but about sunset the command halted and went into camp about a mile from the old colonel's house.

Samuel Fairmont seemed delighted with the news of Delaware Dick's approach, and as soon as he found out that the party had gone into camp, he dispatched a servant with a note down to Dick, inviting him and Major Dalrymple up to the place to spend the evening.

Delaware Dick was taken completely by surprise by the tone of the invitation, and was a little slow to accept through fear that a trap was being prepared for him; but when another note came, bearing the signature of Agnes Melross, repeating the invitation, then all doubt was set aside, and the young spy, Major Dalrymple and an escort of ten men rode down to Fairmont Place, where they were received in the most cordial manner by the family.

Samuel Fairmont seemed like a new man. In fact, the events of the past few days had wrought a great change in the old man. He frankly admitted that his sympathy had been with the royalists, but was so no longer. He denounced the king and his mercenary hirelings that were ravaging the country without respect for friend or foe, and pledged his faith to the patriot cause.

Never passed a happier night under the colonel's roof than that which was to have witnessed Agnes's marriage to a man she detested. All present seemed to forget the bitter strife that was convulsing the nation, and the loss and sorrow it had inflicted upon them for the time being. Both old and young did their utmost to heal the wounds that had been inflicted upon the hearts of the Scarlet Wings by the hostile attitude of the colonel on the night of the conflict in the library.

It was with regret, though many bright promises, that the guests took their departure for camp about midnight.

Captain Clement Fairmont remained at the home of his kinsman many weeks. In the mean time he tendered his resignation as captain to the proper authorities, and it being accepted, he never returned to the British army nor British soil. But shortly after his release from military duty he repaired to New Brunswick and married Geraldine Melinott, Dick's sister; and settling in the country became one of the most devoted and honored of American citizens.

Delaware Dick served his country through the war with honor and distinction, and when peace was at length declared, he claimed the hand of the fair little Agnes in wedlock, receiving with it the best wishes and blessings of the aged Samuel Fairmont. And thus peace, love and happiness became the inheritance of our young friends, which lasted through life with them.

As to the "power behind the throne," the mysterious friend of whom Dick so often spoke, the young ranger-spy's lips forever remained sealed, probably out of respect for that unknown personage's wish. But the Scarlet Wings became fully convinced, after giving the matter close attention, that the old Indian, Doctor Dave, whose assistance had enabled Dick to play the double role which we have recorded, and which is but an incident of the unwritten history of the struggle for Independence, was that Silent Friend.

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